Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?

Arts Practitioners in the Cultural Policy Process

by

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Contents

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Declaration and Inclusion of Previously Used Material

Some of the material used in this thesis was researched and written up in 1997 for a chapter in a report to the Saison Foundation of Tokyo on theatre policy in Britain: Woddis, Jane, 'New Playwriting', in Kawashima, Nobuko (ed.), *Aspects of Theatre Policy in Britain: a Study of Seven Cases: Policy, Excellence and Innovation in Theatre*. That report has not been published. Where the material is used in this thesis its inclusion is indicated.

This thesis is entirely the work of the candidate.

The thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy activity, both as a general concern for cultural policy studies and in the specific arena of post-war cultural policy in Britain. In so doing it challenges a common perception that arts practitioners have no such involvement, and seeks to discover the extent and form of their activity. It explores the history of practitioners' participation in cultural policy formation and implementation; what obstacles they have faced and how their involvement could be better facilitated; and, importantly, why it matters whether they are involved. These issues have remained largely unrecognised among cultural policy researchers.

Part II of the thesis examines the subject through a case study of new playwriting policy in England. Drawing on unpublished primary documents, interviews, and observation, it pays particular attention to playwrights' organisations and their history of self-directed activity. These organisations and other agencies concerned with theatre writing are embedded in networks which cross the boundaries of policy and creative practice. The thesis argues that arts practitioners can enhance their place in the policy process through their own actions, and that participation in these networks increases their opportunity for policy input and influence.

Of key importance is the question as to why the involvement of practitioners in cultural policy activity is of any significance. The thesis puts forward the view that arts practitioners and their organisations can be seen as part of the fabric of civil society, and their participation in policy activity as contributing to the maintenance and enlargement of democratic life. It is, then, not a marginal issue, nor of concern to the arts alone, but integral to a wider debate about sustaining democratic engagement and the civic arena in the twenty-first century.

Abbreviations

Arts Council of England	ACE
Arts Council of Great Britain	ACGB
Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts	CEMA
Coventry Theatre Network	CTN
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	DCMS
Department for National Heritage	DNH
Independent Theatre Council	ITC
MA in Playwriting Studies (University of Birmingham)	MAPS
National Arts and Media Strategy	NAMS
National Campaign for the Arts	NCA
New Playwrights' Trust	NPT
Northern Playwrights' Society	NPS
North West Playwrights	NWP
Regional Arts Association	RAA
Regional Arts Board	RAB
Scottish Society of Playwrights	SSP
South West Arts	SWA
Theatre Writers' Group	TWG
Theatre Writers' Union	TWU
Theatres' National Committee	TNC
Theatrical Management Association	TMA

West Midlands Arts	WMA
Writers' Guild of Great Britain	WGGB

Original spellings have been retained, resulting sometimes in variable spellings of the same word in different documents: thus, for example, Theatre Writers' Union Newsletter is sometimes spelt without the apostrophe.

Introduction

Arts Practitioners as Spear-Carriers or Speaking Parts?

This study investigates the role of arts practitioners in the formation and implementation of cultural policy. In so doing it challenges a common perception that practitioners have little or no involvement in cultural policy activity. The perception is apparent in much cultural policy research literature – as will be illustrated in the first chapter – as well as being commonplace on an anecdotal level.[1] Their role is explored here both as a general concern for cultural policy studies and in the specific arena of British cultural policy, with particular reference to policies on new playwriting for the theatre. To use a theatre analogy, the study investigates whether, on the 'stage' of cultural policy activity, arts workers have the marginal role of spear-carriers[2] or, instead, are cast-members with significant speaking parts.

At the heart of this investigation is the question of why it matters whether practitioners are involved; and this is answered through placing it within a discussion about the importance of participation in democratic life, and in particular about engagement in civil society. The subject is thus of political and philosophical significance, and not simply an administrative or technical matter. Practical issues related to participation, however, are also examined, including the obstacles practitioners have faced in their efforts to participate, and ways in

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[1] Throughout the period of research for this thesis I was struck by the frequency of comments from fellow-practitioners, researchers, and others interested in the field to the effect that either arts practitioners are simply not involved in policy-making, or are willing but excluded.

[2] 'Spear-carrier' is the name given to minor parts in plays where some actors have to stand in the background while those with speaking roles play their parts at centre-stage. The term originates from those classic plays where there would often be a number of actors required to represent guards or soldiers, and who might indeed be called upon to hold a spear in this role.

which their involvement could be facilitated and improved. The thesis therefore offers a strong prompt, both to scholars of cultural policy studies and to those with responsibility for public cultural policy in government and the arts funding system, to take arts practitioners into account – philosophically, politically, and practically – as significant players in the policy process.

Given the central role of arts practitioners in making the culture that is the focus of cultural policy itself, and thereby the subject of cultural policy studies, it appears a surprising omission that the issue of practitioner involvement in cultural policy activity has remained largely unrecognised among researchers in the field. The gap is also remarkable in the light of recognition in the broad area of public policy studies (of which cultural policy study is a part) that policy activity does indeed involve a wide range of participants, and that there are important matters to be considered in relation to this involvement – such as the processes by which involvement might take place, the status and influence of participants, and the ways in which participants relate to each other.

To anchor the subject and explain it in greater detail, the thesis focuses on a concrete area of cultural policy and participation therein: it examines the case of new theatre writing policy in England, setting this in the context of arts practitioners' involvement in British post-war cultural policy-making more generally. Through examining this specific case the thesis thus also makes a contribution to policy literature more generally, since "there is less written about what policy participants actually do than on almost any other aspect of policy" (Colebatch 2002, p.121).

Two factors especially influenced the choice of this research topic. The first is the gap between my own experience as an arts practitioner and the picture presented in much of the research in the field. In contrast to the general absence in cultural policy research of discussion about the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy processes, as a practitioner myself I was directly aware of, and involved in, instances of engagement by arts workers in policy activity. These included participation in local authority and Arts Council consultations and reviews; and involvement in forums set up by practitioners to discuss artform issues that might in practice have a bearing on public policy.

The second factor was the discovery, through an earlier unpublished short study on playwriting policy which I undertook for the Saison Foundation in Japan (Woddis, 1997), that a variety of national and regional organisations, especially including writers' own self-help associations, were involved in policy discussion and implementation in the field of new theatre writing. These groups undertook activities to raise the profile of new playwriting, and campaigned for better working conditions for writers. My curiosity was further aroused by an observation from Nobuko Kawashima that the picture drawn in that study differed from her experience of Japanese policy-making, where arts organisations tend not to develop their own policies independently from government and funders.[3] Together, these created an impulse to investigate the reasons for the disparity between my own knowledge and the picture presented in cultural policy research; to find out more about arts practitioners' role in policy activity; and to explore ways to analyse and theorise the subject.

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[3] Correspondence with the author, March 1997.

The thesis aims to provide a unique study of arts practitioners' role in policy activity by combining several distinct strands of investigation. The purpose of combining these different elements is to find appropriate tools for analysing the subject, to ground the topic in its historical and political context, and to provide a philosophical framework for understanding the significance of the subject. The thesis examines analytic approaches to participation found in public policy studies – these highlight the involvement of a range of actors in the policy process, and put forward notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' groups, and the related concepts of 'resource-rich or poor' – and it considers the applicability of these approaches to cultural policy. It gives an historical account of debates and activities concerning the participation of arts workers in public cultural policy in Britain after 1945; and makes a detailed investigation of practitioners' involvement in policy activity in the particular case of new playwriting in England. The study discusses both philosophical and practical aspects of key issues concerning participation (such as representation; access and influence; special interests and the 'common good'); and proposes that the role of practitioners in policy activity is enhanced by their involvement in networks of policy and creative practice. The thesis also elaborates a wider theoretical framework based on ideas of democratisation, governance, and civil society, for understanding the significance of practitioners' involvement in cultural policy activity. Using this framework the argument is made that the participation of arts practitioners is integrally connected to a conception of society that is both democratic and dynamic, and in which active civic engagement is central.

There are three reasons for selecting new playwriting policy as the case study for this thesis. The first, and key, reason is that my earlier short study (referred to above (Woddis, 1997)) indicated that this area would be likely to provide

evidence of practitioners attempting to become involved in policy-making, and might therefore offer sufficient material from which a range of relevant questions could be considered. It would therefore provide a strong basis from which to explore the wider questions and concepts introduced and discussed in Part I of the thesis.

The second factor influencing the choice of case study subject is that new playwriting itself is necessary for sustaining the theatre as a live and relevant artistic form in contemporary society.[4] Without it, theatre's capacity for contemporary analysis and comment is limited to new interpretations of existing drama. However relevant and vibrant these are – and revelatory and innovative interpretations of a wide range of existing plays take place in many English theatres and other public spaces – they cannot alone undertake the task of investigating the meaning of contemporary society.[5] New plays engage directly with current questions and concerns;[6] they enrich the store and provide fresh inspiration. The theatre critic Michael Billington has written that "for the past 30 years much of the best new writing in Britain has been for the theatre. It is one of the things we have become famous for".[7] The policies governing and shaping the circumstances in which new plays are created and presented thus form a subject that is of interest and importance in its own right.

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[4] The upsurge in new writing that took place in the mid-1990s has been described as giving theatre in Britain "a new lease of life". Simon Gammell, 'Editorial: Write on', *British drama and dance on tour*, (British Council), No.10, June 1997, p.1.

[5] This is not to ignore the interesting point made by theatre director Peter Sellars, that one reason why classic texts "occupy such a crucial place on the contemporary stage is because we need at times not to be so literal abut the world" (Delgado and Heritage 1996, p.5).

[6] David Edgar suggests that all major periods of new playwriting in Britain have been closely linked to social and political changes (Edgar 1999, p.4-5). A useful exploration of this phenomenon can be found in Adrienne Scullion's discussion of the role that drama can play in challenging and developing Scottish identity in the period of post-devolution (Scullion, 2001).

[7] Michael Billington, 'Where have all our playwrights gone?', *Guardian*, 5th March 1988, p.16.

It should be noted, however, that the main focus of my investigation is not the impact of policy development on artistic products, nor the converse; but rather on the conditions in which artistic work takes place. It does not, therefore, examine play-texts themselves or the work of specific writers or theatres, either to ascertain the effect of policies on their form or content, or to investigate whether the plays themselves have had an impact on cultural policy. My concern instead is with the ways in which public policies on playwriting, and the policies of theatres, affect the environment in which plays are written and presented. The study therefore looks at issues affecting broad developments in new writing such as the restriction of new plays to studio theatres; the proportion of new plays in the repertoire; and the opportunities for, and remuneration of, playwrights. The thesis is concerned then not with textual criticism – the cultural studies strand of cultural policy research – but rather with a politics of cultural policy.

The third reason for focusing on new playwriting is because its role in changing and developing theatre as a meaningful and living medium means that, as a policy area, it is likely to be dynamic and changing – an arena in which policy formation and implementation might be the subject of vigorous debate. It should therefore provide a fruitful terrain in which to explore policy activity.

The next sections of this introduction explain the methodology of the research, beginning with some comments on the field of cultural policy studies. There is then a discussion of the general approach of case studies, and details of the conduct of the particular study of new playwriting policy carried out for this research. The definitions used in the thesis and the parameters of the research are given. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the three parts of the thesis that follow.

Methodology

i) The Field of Cultural Policy Studies

Cultural policy research is a relatively young field of study, straddling a number of disciplines. It does not yet (and given its multi-disciplinary nature and its growing scope, may never) have a set path of research method. Its researchers are thus able to draw on a range of different techniques and approaches, and to combine them in a variety of ways. This has both its advantages and disadvantages, and the challenge of each new piece of research in this field is to find a way of successfully building a methodology that can do justice to the topic under consideration, explaining and illuminating it sufficiently, and drawing out useful and adequate findings and ideas.

This thesis combines library and archival research using both primary and secondary material, with interviews of people actively involved in the specific case of new playwriting policy in England. It knits these elements together with a theoretical discussion of participation in civil society. The first part of the thesis explores the treatment of arts practitioners in cultural policy research; discusses analytic approaches in the generic field of public policy theory; traces the history of debates in the arts community about their involvement in policy activity; and develops a theoretical framework in which to consider questions of their participation. It is based more heavily on secondary material, while the second part – which gives greater focus to the case study of new theatre writing policy – draws mainly on the primary material of interviews, observation, and written documentation.

The thesis thus not only uses several research techniques to investigate the topic, but, in order to build and develop its argument, also draws on ideas and approaches from a number of academic disciplines in both humanities and social sciences. These include social and public policy studies and analysis, sociology, political philosophy and political science, history, and the arts. The literature studied during my research therefore reflects this cross-disciplinary approach. The thesis finds in social and public policy sciences key concepts and approaches that can be applied to the agencies involved in cultural policy processes, and to the way they relate to each other. It draws on historical and autobiographical accounts of British cultural policy and developments in the arts to fill in the background to the case study; and utilises sociological literature and theoretical books on the arts to throw light on significant turns in the historical background. Ideas in political philosophy and political science provide the framework for the theoretical examination of the subject.

The reason for delving into these several disciplines for appropriate concepts and narratives is precisely because of the lack of investigation into the role of arts practitioners in the existing cultural policy literature. Cultural policy research alone has not yet produced sufficient tools and reference points to examine this question both broadly and in depth. It was therefore necessary to search elsewhere for terms and approaches that could illuminate the central subject of the study. The thesis thus adds not only to the content of cultural policy research literature, by introducing a new focus for discussion and analysis; but also contributes to the development of the discipline itself, following in the footsteps of many other writers on cultural policy who have similarly sought useful concepts, techniques, and approaches from different fields. Indeed, cultural

policy research has been described as precisely "a field of study which is capable of accommodating various academic disciplines" (Kawashima 1999, p.24).

It has also been observed that the field of cultural policy studies has several differentiated schools of thought; and to some extent this stems from the academic disciplines on which they draw. Oliver Bennett has identified two distinct "claims to the ownership of cultural policy research" (2004, p.237), one of which is closely tied to cultural studies and is concerned with cultural values and questions of power; while the other "is largely seen as the investigation of instrumental questions through empirical social science" (p.242), with a greater connection to "the practical and institutional realities of making policies for culture" (p.246).

Other commentators have noted similar distinctions among approaches to cultural policy studies. Kawashima (1999), for example, pinpoints three academic disciplines which have had an impact on cultural policy studies: to cultural studies she adds cultural economics and sociology of culture, and compares the abstraction of the former with the empiricism of the latter two. However, none of these approaches, she suggests, have "sought to address issues and problems that are seen as relevant by policy-makers and practitioners in the cultural sector" (p.11). Juxtaposed against this theoretical work Kawashima places "basic descriptions" (p.11), such as the Council of Europe evaluations of national cultural policies and "overviews of specific sectors or issues" including public enquiry reports (p.8).

A number of writers have warned of the way in which political considerations can come to frame and restrain research which is tied to current policy concerns

(e.g. Kawashima 1999; Schuster 1996); and this is reflected in the title of Henrik Kaare Nielsen's paper on cultural policy research, *Critical Public Agent or Hired Hand?* (1999). Discussing on the one hand "instrumental, pragmatic research primarily serving to justify the work of those assigning the tasks" and on the other, research which contributes to "critical thinking" (p.183), Nielsen concludes that although "a dialogue is highly desirable" it is nevertheless "important to maintain that we are dealing with two different types of practice, and that one cannot meaningfully be reduced to a hireling for the other" (p.198).

The possibility of whether, and how, bridges can be built between critical and practical research, has been a feature of the continuing debate between, in particular, Tony Bennett (1992, 1998, 2000) and Jim McGuigan (1995, 1996, 2004b). McGuigan (1995) describes the differentiation between critical cultural studies and more practically-oriented cultural policy research as "an unfortunate separation", which exists "in spite of the actual and potential affinities between these two fields of knowledge" (p.105). Tom O'Regan (1992), contributing to the debate in its early stages, similarly laments the "binary terms" of the discussion (p.413). Therefore although he, like Nielsen, refers to criticism and cultural policy research as "different forms of life" that "go happily along their more or less parallel, more or less divergent paths" (p.418), he also argues that "both dimensions are important to [a] critical and pedagogic programme" (p.421). Tony Bennett (2000) approaches the differentiation in another way. He speaks of the necessity "of interrelating the work that intellectual workers of different kinds do in different contexts" (p.11), arguing that there is not "an essential split between different mental operations, but [...] a division between those contexts in which intellectual work is disconnected from immediate practical consequences (academic contexts) and those in which it is, and has to be,

connected to such consequences (government and industry contexts)" (ibid.). This is rather different to McGuigan's plea for making "critical intellectuals [...] practical" and "practical intellectuals [...] critical" (1996, p.190). The difference then is not one that arises from place of work, but rather, a difference of ethos; for there are critical and instrumental approaches to research to be found in both academe and the so-called 'real world' of policy.

My study seeks to contribute to a cultural policy studies that, while engaging with the practicalities of policy, also recognises the importance of critical theory in both illuminating and questioning the ways in which society is organised and in which culture is produced. It focuses on its subject – the involvement of arts practitioners in policy activity – as not simply an administrative or technical matter but, by discussing the rationale for that involvement, as one that also raises important political and philosophical dimensions. It aims to prompt both scholars and those with responsibility for public cultural policy to take serious account of arts practitioners' role in policy-making. It also aims to be of value to arts workers themselves – both practically and as an aid to their own reflexivity. McGuigan has pointed out (1995) that the necessity of keeping open the space for "democratic deliberation [...] is one of the reasons why a commitment to critique, and not only technical practicality, is necessary for responsible intellectual work in the field of cultural policy" (p.113). In this way, the approach of this study, combining critical theory with its practical focus on policy, also connects to the core of its argument: the importance of democratic engagement in an active civil society.

ii) The Case Study

In order to anchor the broad subject of the thesis more firmly and to illustrate it in detail, my research includes a specific case study: that of policy for new playwriting in England. It places this in historical context by tracing the involvement of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making generally in post-war Britain and the debates that occurred around the issue of participation.

The reasons for undertaking a case study for this research are firstly that case studies provide detailed evidence and insight, derived precisely from focusing on one instance of the phenomenon being investigated. The case study of playwriting policy therefore enables the conceptual and theoretical arguments developed in Part I to be examined in the context of real events and debates. Case studies are also useful tools for investigating processes and relationships, as their in-depth, detailed approach can make it possible to "unravel the complexities of a given situation" and "discover how the many parts affect one another" (Denscombe 1998, p.31). Since it is the *process* of engagement in cultural policy by arts practitioners that is at the heart of my subject, and since this participation must necessarily involve relationships with other agencies active in the field, the case study approach is particularly appropriate and relevant to this research.

As indicated above, the selection of the particular case study topic – new playwriting policy – was based especially on prior awareness that theatre practitioners had been involved in some policy activity concerning new writing for the theatre. It therefore offered a potentially fertile subject for investigation of the thesis's central question about practitioner involvement in cultural policy-making. In taking this approach the thesis draws on the work of writers such as Harry F. Wolcott (1995), who advises his students not to make a random

selection for investigation (as would be the method in quantitative research) as it contains the risk of ending up with examples where the phenomenon being studied does not exist; but rather, to pinpoint a situation where there *is* evidence for its existence (p.89). As Kathleen M. Eisenhardt points out, "given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, it makes sense to choose cases [...] in which the process of interest is 'transparently observable' " (Eisenhardt 1989, p.537).

This is the approach of 'theoretical sampling', where the aim is to select cases "which are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory" (Eisenhardt, p.537); and which therefore involves "selecting a study population on theoretical rather than, say, statistical grounds" and searching "for validity of findings, rather than representativeness of study population" (Finch and Mason 1990, p.28). The case study is therefore an 'illustration' rather than being presented as typical. But by embedding it in the wider discussions and analyses examined, it opens up the question "to what extent is the one in some *important* ways like the many?" (Wolcott, p.174, original emphasis) and to consider that while the case itself is "particular, its implications [can be] broad" (ibid.). It may also be, of course, that the one is in some important ways *different* from others, and these differences can be just as useful in drawing out conclusions about the central question of arts practitioners' involvement in policy-making. The key point is that the case study is connected to a theoretical framework, which makes it possible to widen its relevance and applicability (Yin 1989, pp.38, 40).

Robert K. Yin also points out that while case studies are frequently "confused with [...] qualitative research" (Yin 1989, p.25), they can "include and even be limited to, quantitative evidence" (p.24). The case study here provides a

qualitative account of theatre practitioners' involvement in policy activity, giving a picture of their concerns, their actions, and the ways in which they operate together; but it does not attempt to quantify these things.

One reason for this is that much of the study is not easily quantifiable: it is concerned with the nature of the actions undertaken by practitioners, rather than the number; with the engagement of playwrights and theatre companies in the issues of new writing itself; the nature of the policy processes available to them; the conditions and circumstances in which they act; and the detailed working out of events. There is, additionally, considerable variation existing within the case study that makes quantification difficult: for instance, the geographical regions studied differ not only in the number of theatre companies and playwrights' groups they contain or the number of theatre reviews conducted by the arts funders, but also in the nature of the policies on playwriting adopted by the Regional Arts Boards, the operations of the playwrights' organisations, the regional histories and traditions, and the patterns of connection and collaboration amongst the actors in the field.

Moreover, an important reason for adopting the approach of qualitative research is that its capacity to "illuminate issues and turn up possible explanations", to "explore complexities [...] to 'get under the skin' [...and] to view the case from the inside out" (Gillham, pp.10-11) is most appropriate for an investigation into processes, and the perceptions and objectives of participants in them.

In accordance with standard texts on case study methods (e.g. Yin 1989, Denscombe 1998, Gillham 2000), wherein a combination of sources of evidence are essential to and characteristic of this methodology, three main forms of

primary material have informed my case study. These are interviews, written documentation, and observation (in which are included informal conversations). My objectives in using these three sources were both to gain specific information about the subject which was otherwise unavailable or unclear, and to ascertain the views, feelings, and experiences of those directly involved.

Thirty-three people were interviewed comprehensively, and another eight gave short interviews or answered specific queries. They were playwrights and people working for playwrights' organisations; artistic directors and literary managers of theatre companies; local authority arts officers; Arts Council and Regional Arts Board officers (cf. Appendix 1 for the list of interviewees). The aim was to gain a picture of policy consultations, debates and activities, policy statements and schemes, that encompassed all the main types of agencies – both theatre practitioners and arts funders – involved in new theatre writing policy. For this reason the interviews at regional and local level focused on those geographical regions[8] where all agencies were currently operating, and had been doing so for a sufficient length of time to provide useful material for investigation. The existence of an established regional playwrights' organisation was therefore the deciding factor, as not all regions have one, whereas they all contain the other agencies (i.e. regional arts boards, local councils, and theatre companies). The regions studied therefore were: Northern, North-West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire. At a national level, interviews were undertaken with practitioners at some of the London-based theatres which have a national reputation and remit for new playwriting; and with representatives of national organisations, both funders and practitioners (the Arts Council, New Playwrights' Trust/Writernet,

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[8] The regions correspond to those of the arts funding system.

and Theatre Writers' Union). Some of these interviewees also acted as "informants" for the research (Rubin and Rubin 1995, pp.11, 66), providing a wide range of material and giving answers to queries beyond the scope of their particular organisation. (Further information about the interviews is contained in Appendix 1.)

A large amount of written material was supplied by the interviewees and others involved in the field. This documentation included policy statements, reports, submissions to consultations, newsletters, information sheets, publications, and relevant publicity material. I was also able to access two main sources of primary historical documents: the archive of North West Playwrights, which is held at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, and the personal archive of the playwright David Edgar relating to the Theatre Writers' Union. These included minutes and correspondence, as well as newsletters, articles, and reports.

The thesis also draws on documentation obtained and interviews undertaken in 1997 for the short unpublished study on new playwriting policy which was written for the Japanese Saison Foundation (Woddis 1997). These include material from, and interviews with, organisations in regions other than those studied in depth for this thesis; and a range of information from New Playwrights' Trust/Writernet. The use of this material will be noted in the text, where it occurs.

The third source of primary information came from my attendance at seminars, conferences, and policy consultations, and was gleaned from both observation and informal conversations with individuals at these events. It is important to

note here that my attendance was in the capacity not only of researcher, but also frequently of practitioner (I work as the administrative director of a theatre in education company). In some of these situations I attended primarily as a researcher, in others the reason for my attendance was in the carrying out of my paid job, while in yet others the invitation to me was based on both roles.

Clearly, there are both benefits and drawbacks to this duality (cf Yin 1989, pp.92-94; Burgess, 1992; Wolcott 1995, pp.95-97). The benefits are an insight and knowledge that come from close proximity to the area of study, and a measure of trust that people feel towards someone who works in the same field as themselves. The danger is that one can be too close to the topic, too involved with the people and the situations being investigated, with the implication that one might not be sufficiently objective or impartial in analysing the data. This was a pitfall of which I was constantly aware, and against which I continually strove. But I also attempted to turn my proximity into a positive feature, not only while undertaking the fieldwork but additionally in terms of the outcome: to achieve, in Wolcott's words, "disciplined subjectivity" in which, as well as "some sense of detachment", there is also "involvement [and] room for compassion and understanding" (1995, p.239). What I have tried to remain true to is a goal of producing a study that will not only stand up academically and add to the understanding of researchers in the field, but will also be of interest and use to those – both practitioners and funders – whose practical work creates, nurtures, and supports the development of new writing for the theatre in particular and, more widely, the production of art in all its forms.

iii) Definitions and Parameters

It is necessary to clarify some of the terms already introduced in this chapter and used throughout the thesis. First of all, by 'arts practitioners' is meant professional arts workers,[9] including not only those people who are engaged in both creative and interpretative work (i.e. on the one hand creators of original products, such as playwrights and composers, and on the other performers and interpreters such as directors, actors, and musicians[10]), but also others who play an essential part in the arts organisations involved in the realisation of these arts, such as administrators or managers of theatre companies, or the directors of playwrights' organisations. Secondly, while reference is made in the case study, in Part II of the thesis, to playwrights' organisations and theatre companies as the key agents involved in policy activity, it should be noted that there are also individual free-lance theatre practitioners concerned with issues of policy. Many theatre workers operate on a free-lance basis for at least part of their working lives, and at these times might take part in policy discussions and activities. They should therefore be assumed to be included in the accounts given in the case study.

A further clarification is needed in relation to the difference between 'cultural' and 'arts' policy and practitioners, and the reason for the use of the terms '*cultural* policy' but '*arts* practitioner' in this thesis. The conception of culture that is generally contained in the term 'cultural policy', both in the research

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[9] The reason for limiting the discussion to professionals is due to the arts funding system's exclusion of amateur artists for almost the whole period from 1945 until the end of the twentieth century – therefore the policies that are the subject of discussion in this thesis apply primarily to professional artists.

[10] Some artists, of course, cross the boundary between creation and performing, as they do both these activities (Towse 1996, p.8).

literature and in practice, goes beyond the performing and visual arts.[11] 'Cultural practitioner' as a description would therefore embrace workers in all these quite different spheres; so because my research is focused specifically on the arts it would be misleading to use the term 'cultural', rather than 'arts', practitioner. However, since arts policies themselves are, as just explained, often only a component of wider cultural strategies – especially at local government level – the thesis refers to them as cultural, rather than arts, policies (though where policy statements are specifically focused on the arts, or even particularly on theatre, those terms – arts or theatre policy – are used instead).

Similar points relate to definitions within the case study of playwriting policy. Thus, the discussion in Part II of the thesis focuses on new playwriting as a discrete body of activity and policy, and most of the illustrations have the same focus. However, it needs to be remembered that policy on new playwriting is often embedded in wider policies on theatre as a whole (which in turn are frequently contained in wider arts or cultural strategies). Similarly, some of the theatre networks and collaborations referred to have new playwriting as only one concern among several.

An explanation of 'policy' and some related terms is also in order. It is widely held that there is not one single meaning of 'policy' as a concept. Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn, in one of the key texts on policy analysis (1984), give ten ways in which the term can be used (pp.13-14), while Christopher Ham and Michael Hill describe it as "an extremely slippery concept" (Ham and Hill

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[11] The Department for Culture, Media and Sport suggests that there are at least thirteen areas in addition to the arts that can be included in the term of 'culture' (DCMS 2000, p.6). A typical English local authority cultural strategy will thus also cover media, public spaces, libraries, fashion, tourism, children's play, architecture, and possibly more.

1993, p.103). Hogwood and Gunn also explain policy as a process, consisting of steps or stages, such as defining the issue, establishing aims and priorities, implementation, and evaluation. They point out, however, that although these steps can be distinguished in theory, in practice there are many overlaps, and stages may be missed out or undertaken in different orders (p.4). Such analysis leads Ham and Hill to observe that "it is hard to identify particular occasions when policy is made. Policy will often continue to evolve within what is conventionally described as the implementation phase rather than the policy-making phase" (pp.11-12).

This thesis is concerned with arts practitioners' involvement in the process as a whole. It thus usually refers to 'policy process(es)' and, drawing on H. K. Colebatch (2002), "policy activity" (pp.110-121); though sometimes for stylistic purposes it also uses 'policy-making' as a shorthand for the whole. More specific references are also made to 'policy formation and implementation', as representing the main parts of the process in which arts practitioners seek engagement.

This sense of policy as a process, as an activity that people engage in, is further distinguished by Colebatch from policy statements that are the outcome of the process (p.121). However, in general usage the term 'policy' *is* also used to refer to such statements, and it is therefore employed in the thesis with this meaning as well, which should be clear from the contexts in which it is used.

Hogwood and Gunn further distinguish different types of policy analysis or study, and this thesis falls into two of these categories: policy process studies and process advocacy. The former focuses on the way policies are made, including

the activities of the different actors in the stages of the process; while the latter is intended "not simply to understand the policy-making process but to change it [...]. The emphasis is less upon what any particular policy should be than with *how* policies ought to be made" (Hogwood and Gunn 1984, pp.27-28, original emphasis). The central concern of this thesis is the place of arts practitioners in the process of cultural policy-making: their attempts to affect both policy and the policy process. Thus it investigates the methods, actions, debates, and actors involved, and considers ways of improving the participation of practitioners in policy formation and implementation.

Nonetheless, my study does also describe and investigate the content and effect of policies. As mentioned above, Colebatch defines policy statements as the main "outcome" of the policy process (p.121). Other analysts distinguish between 'outputs' and 'outcomes', with the former term referring actually to Colebatch's 'outcomes', i.e. the policy decisions and statements, and the latter term then being the "effects" that the policies have (Ham and Hill 1993, p.14). Hogwood and Gunn (1984) consider the distinction between outcomes and outputs "an important one", though they admit also that it can be "difficult to make in practice" (p.17). My thesis examines both policy outputs and outcomes where these are germane to the study's central focus on practitioners' involvement in the policy process.

Thus, in Part II, I outline the policies on new writing in the arts funding system, in order to explain the context in which theatre practitioners have operated; and discuss specific areas of policy which the theatre community has tried to influence. While the discussion here is mainly about policy outputs, i.e. decisions and statements concerning support for new playwriting, there is also some

discussion of outcomes, that is, the effect of the outputs on theatre writers and writing. Reference is made, for example, to the proportion of new plays in the repertoire, and the impact of confining new writing largely to studio theatres. But, as noted earlier, the thesis does not attempt a more extended examination of how policies might affect the form and content of plays; nor investigate, other than in specific examples pertinent to the central concern of the study, whether the involvement of practitioners in the policy process has an impact on artistic products. (This does not mean that cultural criticism, involving the examination of texts and their meanings, is unimportant, but rather that "issues concerning how texts are made and circulated socially [are put] into the foreground" (McGuigan 1996, p.22). Hence, as I have indicated, there is some discussion of artistic form and content in the case study, and it is also a matter posited for further research in the final chapter.)

A further point of definition to note is the extent to which the policies discussed in this thesis are public ones. Playwrights and theatre companies, together and separately, are concerned with policies of the state arts funding system, while playwrights also pay attention to the policies of theatre companies. While policies that are the remit of government and of the arts quangos (Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations/Boards) are clearly public, strictly speaking those of the theatre companies are not, as they are privately run (though non-profit-making). However, because public subsidy forms a large part of the income of most theatres,[12] it means that their policies are closely intertwined with those of the funding bodies. Thus, as will be illustrated in later chapters, many of

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[12] Between 1987 and 1994, for example, public subsidy represented 44-48% of the income of the main theatre companies supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain (Feist 1996, p.17); while in 1995-6 small-scale touring companies received 70% of their income from public sources (Feist 1996, p.21)

the debates and actions of both playwrights and theatre companies have necessarily been entangled with public policies even where the main focus of those activities and debates was not the public policy itself.[13]

A final clarification of geography and period is necessary: the scope of several of the chapters takes in matters relating to cultural policy in Britain as a whole, while the case study itself is limited largely to England. This is because, until 1994, the main funding and policy-making body for the arts was the Arts Council of Great Britain;[14] so my discussions of policy and debates around participation are conducted in that wider context. However, because of the specific histories, cultures, and priorities of the nations making up Britain, it would have been necessary to conduct three separate case studies if playwriting policy in Britain as a whole was to be covered fully. It was felt that it would be over-ambitious to attempt to provide the detail and depth across three studies that would do justice to the differing aspects of playwriting and the environment in which it operates in each nation, especially including the new circumstances created by devolution. The case study chosen therefore focuses on England, particularly because of the significant role played by the Theatre Writers' Union and the interesting dimension of the regional playwrights' organisations (although reference is made to the important influence of the Scottish Society of Playwrights).

In order to provide a wide-ranging and detailed investigation of all levels of policy activity, the case study separately covers national, regional, and local

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[13] It is also relevant to note that this thesis does not examine those charitable trusts and foundations that frequently support theatre companies and the playwrights' organisations, since the issue of theatre practitioners' involvement in their policy-making has, to my knowledge, arisen only rarely.

[14] In that year the Arts Council was split into three bodies: covering England, Scotland, and Wales separately.

dimensions – of government and funders in Chapter 4, and of playwriting organisations in Chapter 5. It goes without saying that in actuality these separate levels intersect at many points. These intersections form a part of the complex networks of policy and practice discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

With regard to period, the thesis takes the establishment of the Arts Council in 1945 as its starting point; and although most of the interviews were completed by 2000 it takes into account developments since, including changes in the Arts Council and the regional arts bodies in 2002-3.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts: *The Debate*, *The Case Study*, and *The Conclusion.* The first chapter of Part I argues that the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making is not widely recognised as an issue for detailed or comprehensive consideration in cultural policy research. It compares this treatment to analysis in the generic field of public policy theory, where approaches that pay attention to the role of a wide range of actors in policy activity and which recognise the possibility of 'agency' by those actors, provide useful tools for considering the involvement of arts practitioners. Notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' groups, and of organisations being 'resource-rich or poor', are considered; and the potential for arts practitioners themselves to enhance their place in the policy process by their own organised actions is pinpointed.

Chapter 2 examines debates in the arts about the involvement of practitioners in policy processes in post-war Britain. It shows that concerns about practitioner participation have been expressed from the earliest days of state subsidy when the Arts Council of Great Britain was established in 1945; and it traces the influences of social, political, and economic developments in two key periods. These are the flourishing of alternative and experimental forms of political and artistic activity in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the effects of economic stringency and the ideology of the market society in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter 3 elaborates why the involvement of arts practitioners in cultural policy activity matters, and proposes that the question of their participation can be usefully considered in the context of discussions about democratisation and governance, and through the concept of civil society. Criticisms of conventional representative democracy have led to ideas and experiments to increase democratic involvement. At the same time, the idea of governance, in which a range of non-statutory organisations are involved alongside government in deciding on and providing services, has become widespread. Together, these developments offer both ways of widening participation, and insights into important issues and problems relating to participation. These include issues of representation and accountability; status and influence; and the relationship between 'special interests' and the 'common good'. The chapter goes on to explore the history and meaning of the concept of civil society, and uses it to provide a framework that illuminates practitioners' involvement in policy activity as part of the dynamic of civic engagement in a democratic society.

Part II of the thesis investigates the case of new theatre writing policy in England in order to consider the involvement of practitioners in a specific area of policy.

It explores further whether ideas about interest groups and the model of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as developed in public policy analysis, and the concepts of democratisation, governance, and civil society, provide fruitful insights into this specific policy area and the network of organisations and individuals involved in it. Public theatre writing policy itself is discussed in Chapter 4, in terms both of its development by the arts funding system and of some of the key debates within the area of new writing. The chapter illustrates the multi-faceted nature of playwriting policy, which includes matters related to the terms and conditions of writers' working lives, and wider questions about the place of new plays in the repertoire.

Chapter 5 considers the other main actors in the policy sector, primarily focusing on the playwrights' organisations at national, regional, and local level. Drawing largely on unpublished primary material, interviews and observation, it provides a more comprehensive history and analysis of these organisations than has hitherto been produced.[15] It also looks at the work of theatre companies involved in new writing, and discusses issues of contention between the playwrights' organisations and theatres generally.

Chapter 6 examines the different forms of policy engagement open to theatre practitioners, and puts forward the proposition that there are two primary forms of conscious engagement in policy activity: that invited through official channels of consultations and the 'uninvited' participation that is the result of practitioners' own self-directed activity. It also emphasises the importance of the

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[15] One of the few published works that includes an account of the Theatre Writers' Union, Catherine Itzin's study of political theatre in Britain (1980), covers only the first few years of the Union's existence (pp.306-315).

connections amongst the various actors involved in the field of new playwriting policy, and discusses key issues about the make-up and operation of these networks. The argument is made that the networks cross boundaries of policy and creative practice, with links being made among theatre practitioners and arts funders that weave together both creative collaborations and policy activity. It suggests that theatre practitioners' engagement in these networks increases their opportunity for policy input and influence.

The last chapter, Part III, draws together the findings of the case study, the analytical approaches of public policy research, and the conceptual framework, in order to answer the questions posed at the outset and to establish whether arts practitioners do have a 'speaking part' in cultural policy activity. Highlighting recent threats to civil society from changes brought about by the impact and spread of neo-liberalism, it concludes by arguing for the significance of practitioners' participation in cultural policy activity as part of the task of sustaining and enlarging an active civil sphere at the heart of democratic life.

PART I

THE DEBATE

Chapter 1

Arts Practitioners in Cultural Policy Research

In the literature of cultural policy research, the policy process is frequently seen as a matter primarily for governments and funders, with those who work in the arts being assigned, at most, a marginal role. Two points can be immediately noted. The first is that as arts practitioners are clearly pivotal in the delivery of cultural provision itself, it is particularly surprising that their role in the development of policies governing that provision should not have been considered more deeply. Moreover, as will be seen in this thesis, this absence in the literature does not reflect the reality of practitioners' relation to the policy process. There has been a history of debate in the arts community about the role of arts practitioners in policy formation, and attempts to increase that role; and at least in the case of new playwriting policy, as this study will show, there has been persistent involvement in policy matters. Yet in the research literature (as distinct from historical or contemporary accounts of events and arguments) there is a scarcity of any sustained consideration of arts organisations and artists as contributors to the policy process. This scarcity includes a lack of detail about the practice of participation in policy processes, and of analysis of the issues involved, as well as a wider under-theorisation of the subject.

This chapter examines the ways in which practitioners are treated in cultural policy literature. It compares this treatment to the recognition of practitioners' involvement within the general field of public policy, of which cultural policy of course forms a part. It considers reasons for the gap in cultural policy research, and discusses the applicability of public policy approaches to the cultural field.

Although the focus of the thesis is on Britain, and the case study is largely confined to England, the issue of practitioner involvement in policy matters is of general significance for the field. The literature examined in the following sections is therefore by writers across the international field of cultural policy research.

1.1 The Treatment of Practitioners in Cultural Policy Research

An examination of cultural policy research and analysis dealing with aspects of the policy-making process, in key journals and standard texts, indicates the ways in which arts practitioners are considered by writers in the field. They encompass the exclusion of practitioners from consideration; the limiting of practitioners to roles in which policy-making is absent; a negative or pessimistic stance towards arts workers' participation in the formation of policy; and only occasionally a positive view of practitioner involvement.

An example of the first approach can be found in Peter Bendixen's article in the first issue of the *European Journal of Cultural Policy*. He describes cultural policy as "to a large extent [...] the responsibility of the state and local authorities", in which "these administrative authorities [...] play the main role in the process of formulating cultural policy" (1994, p.121). Similarly, much of the work on models of cultural policy that pertain to different countries has also focused on the role of the state. For example, the paper by Harry Hillman-Chartrand and Claire McCaughey (1989), which examines these models and their historical development, discusses the issues largely in terms of governments and

mentions arts practitioners only in relation to grant-making decisions, not to the wider policy process.

Even research which is focused on a particular policy issue, rather than on broader theory or analysis, may be conducted without serious reference to the arts practitioners involved. For example, J. Mark Davidson Schuster (1995), analysing the funding of culture through dedicated state lotteries, makes little mention of arts practitioners in his survey of eight such lotteries. Touching on the relationship between funders and arts organisations, he refers to the "delicate balance with other actors", especially revenue clients, which funding agencies are likely to have worked out over a period of time (p.347). However, it is not clear whether he is thereby implying that there is an input by arts practitioners into policy making, or simply that the funding agencies are conscious of their obligations towards their clients. Later, in a paragraph beginning with the statement that "One would expect that the promise of new money for the arts and culture through lotteries would have been welcomed with open arms by the sector [...]", he deals only with the reactions of arts councils, and does not mention arts practitioners.

In some research, arts practitioners are recognised as having a role in the implementation of policy, but not necessarily in its formulation. Goran Nylof (1997), proposing a model for evaluation of cultural policy, presents a hierarchy of process in which "political decisions influence administrative plans for activities and decisions, that in turn, influence the direction of individual activities and actions" (p. 364). Thus although Nylof refers to the "actors' perspective" in evaluation processes (by actors he means a wide range of cultural

practitioners), he suggests that the political goals are the concern of national and regional government.

When arts organisations and artists *are* referred to as having some role in the formation of policy, it can be in terms which suggest that their presence is a problematic one. They are represented as being concerned with their own interests (especially financial ones), rather than as possibly being legitimately and usefully involved in the creation of appropriate policies. This leads to them being represented as "pressure groups", who are "claimants" for the financial "cake" (Ridley 1987, p.241). Milton C. Cummings and Richard S. Katz (1987), introducing their volume on government and the arts, outline a view on the role of arts practitioners which continues to hold currency. They describe the use of artistic advisors by funders in the arts funding system, and suggest that while this may help to minimise political and bureaucratic intervention in artistic decisions, the drawback is the production of a "self-perpetuating" artistic elite which stifles experiment and innovation (p.16). In similar vein, Michael Volkerling (1996), in an article on cultural policy theory, apparently accepts David Whitson and Trevor Slack's harsh description of "the monopolistic practices of professions" and the "self interest which [lies] behind the rhetoric of service" (p.192). In this guise, as Ruth-Blandina M. Quinn (1997) points out, such artists have often been imagined as carving the financial cake up "amongst themselves and their associates, leaving crumbs for those who had no seat at the table" (p.132). Ironically, given the lack of practitioner influence discerned by so many writers in the field, these commentators are pointing to a view that ascribes considerable, though apparently unwarranted, influence by some arts practitioners.

To some extent this is understandable, owing to the way in which the Arts Council was established in Britain (and provided a model that was replicated in other countries). As will be discussed in the next chapter in more detail, the Arts Council's early organisation supported a narrow range of arts and arts institutions, and at the same time adopted a system of advisory panels to which only a small number of individual and prominent artists were appointed, and in which recommendations of grant support to other artists were made. Despite some changes in the following decades, this approach and outlook continued to dominate in the Arts Council's organisation and operations, and has inevitably coloured attitudes toward the role of arts practitioners in the system. However, such attitudes do not take us very far in reaching a wider understanding of the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making.

Another body of literature does ascribe a more serious intention to practitioners' participation in cultural policy, but concludes that their role is very limited. Andrew J. Taylor (1995), in a short paper on arts policy in Britain, touches briefly on the involvement of arts practitioners in policy processes, but his conclusions are rather pessimistic. He is of the opinion that most arts organisations have little influence, and that "ultimately the decisive actor [...] is government" (p.132). He also argues that co-ordinated actions to influence policy are problematic for the arts community, due to "the complexity and diversity of the arts sector" (p.134).

Clive Gray's study of changes in the management of arts policy in Britain in the late twentieth century pays serious attention to involvement by practitioners in arts policy-making, but also reaches pessimistic conclusions about their ability to have an influence (Gray, 2000). He describes the arts sector as "fragmented"

(p.85), and puts forward an analysis in which he concludes that "the mass of arts organisations are peripheralised", having "relative powerlessness" and an "inability to effectively influence the policy-making processes" (p.93). He argues that only a small number of arts organisations and individuals who reflect and maintain the dominant cultural values of society are able to bring any influence to bear on policy. He proposes that the many uninfluential actors "are constrained by the power that is held by the relatively few", and goes on to suggest that there is only an "appearance of relatively pluralist opportunities for participation [...] masking the reality of a fairly closed field of operation" (p.104). Although Gray gives some brief examples of policy being changed as a result of practitioner pressure, he is of the opinion that factors external to the arts sector are the key influences, and that "the arts have not really been able to mount any form of meaningful dialogue about what is appropriate to the sector in its own terms" (p.154).

Those writers who approach the contribution of artists and arts organisations in a more positive light are, however, sometimes tantalisingly brief. Oliver Bennett (1991), in his survey of British cultural policies, stresses that "these policies are of course strongly influenced by the many organisations which produce and promote art, and it is these organisations that give meaning to the policies" (p.297). But the point – although touched on again in a reference to the impact of the community arts movement on the debate over access to the arts – is not developed. Similarly, Jennifer Craik (1996), concluding her discussion of the development of hybrid cultural policy strategies, suggests that "part of the challenge is to establish genuine interaction and exchange between members of the cultural policy community – practitioners, policy-makers, intellectuals and

industry." (p.200). The bulk of her paper, though, focuses on the role of government in policy development.

Nevertheless, these more positive references reflect a different approach in cultural policy research from that described by Bennett (1997a) as "a pre-occupation with the bureaucratic actions of the state" (p.2). There is a recognition of the need to question the "limited margin for manoeuvre" and "subsidiary part" allowed to other actors in the field (Bassand 1993, pp.49,56), and to acknowledge the "important" role of "non-governmental actors", with policy being "the result of the inter-relationships of a range of participants" (Gray 1996, p.220, 217).

An example of such recognition is found in Annette Zimmer and Stefan Toepler's discussion of cultural policies in Sweden, Germany and the United States (1996). They specifically state that they do not intend to focus purely on governmental support for the arts, but to give an "emphasis on the influence of private actors on the evolution of cultural policy" (p.169). The article is actually not as emphatic as they suggest, but they do make some references to involvement by arts practitioners (for example as members of Sweden's National Cultural Council and the US's National Endowment for the Arts, or in relation to Swedish artists' unions successfully campaigning for improvement of the economic situation of their members), and briefly raise some issues pertinent to such participation.

Recognition of a role for arts practitioners does appear to be more widely accepted in Nordic cultural policy research, with Per Mangset asserting that "close co-operation between the professional artists' organisations and the state

is a distinct characteristic" of policy in those countries (Mangset 1997, p.106). But such acknowledgement cannot be explained simply by reference to the particular experience of Nordic countries. As my study will show, there is more involvement of practitioners in British cultural policy matters than is reflected in the research literature. In other words, it cannot be assumed that the literature is indicative of the actual relation of practitioners to the policy process in any given country. Moreover, the argument of this thesis is that practitioners' involvement in cultural policy activity is an issue for cultural policy research in general, and not just for those countries where it already has some recognition.

A further instance of consideration being given to arts practitioners is in Nobuko Kawashima's study of museum management (1997b). In this investigation she draws on the work of Beyer, Stevens, and Trice (1983) in public policy research, to question the assumption that cultural organisations are 'black boxes' "into which policy flow[s]" (Kawashima, p.150), and suggests that attention needs to be paid to what happens inside the 'boxes'. Cultural organisations, she argues, cannot simply be seen as the passive receivers of 'transmitted' policy, but have varying responses according to their differing capacities.

Another study that considers the role of arts practitioners is Krister Malm and Roger Wallis's major examination of music and the media, focusing on six small countries (1992). Malm and Wallis pay considerable attention to music practitioners, and their relationship to media policy, recognising that "a number of parties are involved in shaping music policies for the media" (p.21).

In their analysis they make a distinction between what they refer to as "direct policymakers" and those they term "indirect influences through decisions in

related bodies" (ibid.). Practitioners appear only in the latter category, in a reference to musicians' unions and in the phrase "agents and their clients" (p.35). Moreover, they suggest that the influence of "music activists" on policy decisions and implementation "can be extremely weak" (p.23), and argue that "all too often technological and economic variables have decided the rules of the game, with policymaking tagging along behind" (p.197).

Nevertheless, some of Malm and Wallis's chapters paint a different picture, such as in relation to the range of music played on radio stations in Trinidad and Tobago, where "the main pressures and protests have come [...] from the musicians" (p.73). Indeed, the authors describe the attempts of musicians to affect radio and television music policies on these islands as "legion", involving "both individuals and organizations" (p.74). Such actions have included calypso musicians creating songs which "specifically addressed the subject of music policy in the media", a musician's lone 'sit-down strike', and lobbying by the steelband association around its own policy document (pp.74-5). In Sweden it was the actions of folk musicians and their organisations in putting on a year's activities in localities across the country, that influenced coverage of folk music and dance in the media and affected government policy towards the sector; while a targeted boycott by Swedish composers, which prevented radio broadcasts of their music, led to the desired effect of the radio channels subsequently increasing the amount of Swedish music played.

It is at the local level that Malm and Wallis have found the greatest participation by practitioners in attempts to influence policy: "a rich variety of groups representing different music activities, often trying with varying degrees of success to affect policy in the music media" (p.236). In an interesting parallel

with the subject of my own case study, the two authors point to "the growth of music organizations representing particular cultural or professional interests" (ibid.). At the national level, on the other hand, "electronic signals coming in from outside and up above" have introduced "a whole new set of limitations on broadcasting policy" with the result that national organisations such as the musicians' unions have seen "their power diminishing in most countries" (p.229).

Although Malm and Wallis's investigation contains an important and sustained consideration of the relation of practitioners to policy, its relevance needs to be qualified in the context of the theme for this thesis. There are of course significant differences between the worlds of the theatre and mass music media. For instance, whereas my focus is on public policy towards the subsidised arts, Malm and Wallis have to pay considerable attention to policy toward commercial production and distribution, in which a small number of very big phonogram companies "have consolidated their control over manufacturing and distribution" (p.202). Also, although there is an international dimension in theatre policy and practice, there is not the particular impact from the global reach of the "electronic signals" that so circumscribes media policy.

Furthermore, the two authors do not examine fully the input of practitioners into the policy-making process. Firstly, they do not always explain how particular policies have been developed, nor who has been involved in the process; so although, for example, it may be safe to assume that Saami musicians made some contribution to the Swedish government's decision to support phonogram production of Saami songs, Malm and Wallis do not provide information to indicate whether or not this was the case. Secondly, the authors' objective in their

book is "to map out the interaction between music in the mass media and music *activities* in society at large" (p.3, my emphasis); so much of their discussion is in relation to the effect of the music practice itself, rather than the musicians' contribution to the actual process of policy-making in the form of debate, policy proposals, consultation, and so on.

Malm and Wallis provide an important contribution to the scanty literature on the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making, but the two authors leave largely unacknowledged a range of issues about methods and principles of consultation, representation, and participation that arise from a more precise focus on the role of practitioners in policy-making.

In conclusion then, despite some examples of studies which do take into account the role of practitioners in cultural policy formation and implementation, as a rule artists and arts organisations are not considered in the literature of cultural policy research as contributors to the policy-making process. Yet in the general field of public policy research, of which cultural policy is a part, there has been a greater recognition that practitioners may well be involved in the policy process. The following sections therefore examine how public policy theory considers practitioners' participation in policy, and whether some approaches in this field may be usefully applied in cultural policy research.

1.2 The Treatment of Practitioners in Public Policy Theory

Although the term 'public policy' is still sometimes described as "those policies developed by governmental bodies and officials" (Walt 1994, p.41), a large body

of public policy theory recognises and investigates the role of a wider range of actors in policy activity.

In their influential study of policy analysis Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn (1984) state that "policies typically involve the interplay of many actors and organizations and the working out of complex relationships between them" (p.22), so that "the study of a 'policy' usually involves tracing multiple interactions among many individuals, many groups, and many organizations" (p.20). They go on to argue that in *public* policy-making, while the public nature of the process means that the policy "must at least have been partly developed *within* the framework of government" (original emphasis), "few public policies [...] involve the participation of governmental agencies alone" (p.23). Indeed, Gill Walt, quoted above, has to qualify her own definition of public policy as being developed by government, agreeing that "in most liberal democracies and some other political systems [...] there is room to manoeuvre, to challenge and change government policy" (p.39).

The role of other actors is also emphasised by H. K. Colebatch (2002), who argues that "other participants have a very significant role to play, particularly in the impact they have on what things are seen as problems and worthy of policy attention" (p.13). In similar fashion, introducing the first edition of the *Journal of European Public Policy*, its editors refer to "the many private actors [...] in the processes by which agendas are set, issues are processed and policies are implemented" (Richardson and Lindley 1994, p.3); while Christopher Ham and Michael Hill (1993), suggesting that important decisions can be taken during the implementation stage of the policy process, refer to "implementers

(professionals, for example) [who] are better equipped to make the key decisions than anyone else" (p.107).

In Paul A. Sabatier's consideration (1986) of the literature on the debate over 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to public policy, it is the status of those outside government that is one of the key factors that marks the distinction between the two approaches. He describes how bottom-up research begins with "an analysis of the multitude of actors who interact at the operational (local) level on a particular problem or issue" (p.22). Top-down research is criticised by "bottom-uppers" for neglecting other actors whose contributions "would provide the cornerstone for a more dynamic model", and for regarding those other actors as "basically impediments" (Sabatier 1986, p.30) – a description close to the view in cultural policy research of arts practitioners as self-interested problems.

More recent studies in public policy have continued and developed the idea of a dynamic model of policy formation, involving a number of different actors. William A. Maloney, Grant Jordan and Andrew M. McLaughlin (1994), in their discussion of 'insider' and 'outsider' groups, assume the presence of interest groups (including practitioners) in policy-making, and emphasise "the importance of consultative arrangements in policy development"(p.19). Edella Schlager (1995) refers to "the complex, dynamic policy making processes of modern societies" (p.243), and to the importance of "reciprocity" and "repeated interaction" among different actors in the policy process (pp.249ff). More specifically, Paul Boreham, Richard Hall and Martin Leet (1996) discuss the significant role of trade unions in determining the form of welfare regime adopted by different countries. The authors refer to "an interactive relationship between institutions and political structure or political organisation" (p.206).

In contrast, there appears to be little in the field of cultural policy research that examines the involvement of artists and arts organisations in policy-making in the same way as these examples of public policy research consider practitioners in their fields.

A number of questions for cultural policy research therefore arise from a consideration of these analyses in the general field of public policy. In particular, why has cultural policy research apparently lagged behind in examination of these issues? And secondly, how appropriate are such approaches to the study of cultural policy?

1.3 Cultural Policy Research: A 'Late Developer'

The first of these questions has been touched on by a number of commentators in recent years. Nobuko Kawashima (1995), Jennifer Craik (1996) and Geir Vestheim (1996) all point to the newness of cultural policy research, and suggest some reasons for this. Kawashima and Craik both refer to the interdisciplinary nature of cultural policy research. The relative complexity of researching in a multi- or inter-disciplinary way may well be one reason why the field has been developed so late. Closely connected with this, Craik and Vestheim note that much of the work in cultural studies has been of a practical or single issue nature.

A further reason is related to the nature of culture itself. It is, firstly, a multi-faceted concept. Raymond Williams describes it as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (1976, p.87), and suggests several meanings of the word: "a general state or habit of the mind", "the general state of

intellectual development in a society as a whole", "the general body of the arts", and "a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual" (1971, p.16). As Jim McGuigan (1996, p.6) points out, this complexity makes culture "difficult to pin down, so hard to fix in a precise definition or unambiguous mode".

Secondly, culture is highly complex in its purposes and its effects. On the one hand, there are the societal functions, often promoted by government. These include the enhancement of national pride, the forging of national or cultural identity, moral influence, an educative role, economic regeneration, and the promotion of social cohesion or social obedience. On the other hand, culture can be subversive, provocative and disturbing; asking questions of government and society, rather than complying with them. Furthermore, culture has more personal purposes and effects. People are entertained, excited, soothed, or healed by culture; they form hobbies, find meaning in their lives, or widen their understanding of the world through it.

The delay in researching cultural policy may thus be because culture, and thereby cultural policy, is such a tangled, and contradictory, subject. It is necessary to consider policy not only in the light of government intentions, but also taking into account culture's role in subverting the status quo. It is also impossible to disregard the very personal relationship which people have with culture. Kawashima (1995) expresses it as a puzzle as to why governments should "interfere with what are often considered as matters of personal taste and pleasure" (p.299). Anthony Keller (1983) sees a difficulty in tying together policy, which "suggests coherence, inclusion, synthesis – and compromise" with the arts, which "are characteristically singular in their appeal, even when experienced in groups" (p.8).

There are also strong feelings, rooted in history, that art and artists are somehow different from ordinary life and the affairs of state. Thus, Vestheim (1996) suggests that one reason for the lack of cultural policy research may be "the 'sacred' role that the arts and culture play [...]. To study arts in aesthetic categories and terms is one thing, to put together culture and policy and subject them to scientific analysis is to profane a sacred sphere" (p.158). Mangset (1998) makes a point in a similar vein: in his analysis of 'sub-fields' in the arts he categorises the artistic production in the "institutional-elitist" sub-field as "pure art" which, it is judged, "should not be defiled by non-artistic interests or concerns, such as [...] cultural policy efforts to reach a broad public" (pp.61-2). This comment in turn suggests a further explanation. Since, as the title of this sub-field suggests, these arts are those considered the most weighty – the sub-field is "dominated by important art institutions" (p.61) – it is the view of this kind of art that influences the attitude of 'purity' towards the field as a whole.

Such views contributed towards the position noted by John S. Harris at the end of the 1960s, in which "no body of literature exists which systematically sets forth and analyzes the theoretical aspects of government support of the arts" (1969, p.253). These observations also help to explain the specific lack of recognition of arts practitioners in cultural policy research: they indicate that there is a thread of opinion which considers that artists themselves should not be bothered with or by policy matters. As Ruth Towse (1993) points out: "Many people love to cling to the romantic view of the artist as pure and unsullied by mundane worldly concerns" (p.vii). Even where researchers do not themselves actively hold this view, they may yet be influenced by it as an unquestioned assumption.

Another aspect of the relation between government and culture is that cultural policy has not, until recently, been seen as a matter of central political concern. Quinn (1997), examining the history of the Arts Council of Great Britain, refers to "the low status of the arts on the political agenda" (p.129), and Kawashima (1997a) describes it as having been "marginal on the public policy agenda" (p.32). Bennett (1997b) states that the concept of cultural policy itself was developed only after the Second World War; with Zimmer and Toepler (1996) pinning its main political emergence, at least in some countries, even later, to "the heydey of the welfare state" in the 1960s (p.187).

It is only in recent years that cultural policy has moved to a more prominent position, as a result of what has been described as "the maturation of the arts as a significant political and economic force in contemporary Western societies" (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey 1989, p.43). Indeed, Michel Bassand (1993) considers cultural policy to have become in the 1980s "one of the major issues in contemporary society" (p.49). The reasons suggested by Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey for this development are a variety of demographic and economic changes, including an increasingly educated population, and the rising significance of design for countries' export rates. The growth in leisure time is also an important factor in increasing the audience for the arts (Cummings and Katz, 1987). At the same time, a broader definition of culture than simply the traditional fine arts has gained prominence, thus widening its connection to society and altering its "relationship with contemporary social change" (Bassand 1993, p.49).

Vestheim (1996) suggests a further explanatory point: that the traditionally peripheral nature of cultural policy has been caused by a belief that, unlike

education and welfare policies, it did not have a significant role to play in social and economic development. If this is indeed the case, it may explain why cultural policy has been developed to a more sophisticated level in those countries where it has had a longer history of being used as an instrument of such development (for example, in the Netherlands and Sweden).

Moreover, in those countries, such as Britain, where the arts have more recently been brought into consideration as a means of economic and urban regeneration, cultural policy has begun to be accorded a higher place on the political agenda. Chris Smith, Britain's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport from 1997 to 2001, stressed the economic importance of the arts (with a rate of growth then estimated as twice that of the economy as a whole[1]) as a significant reason for government interest and support, and established it as one of the "four key themes" of his Department's remit (Smith 1998, p.2). And Ken Robinson, the Chair of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, (set up by the Labour Government in 1998), cites the growing role of the arts in the economy as one of the factors influencing the work of the Advisory Committee.[2] As a result of such developments cultural policy has moved "much closer to the centre of politics" (McGuigan 1996, p.28).

In summary then, the answers to the question as to why cultural policy research has not yet paid any great attention to the role of arts organisations and artists in policy-making, lie in the fact that the development of cultural policy is relatively recent, and that research in the field has also been slow to develop – complicated

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[1] Chris Smith, 'As TS Eliot said', *Guardian*, 29th May 1998, p.18.
[2] Ken Robinson,'Creativity knows no stereotypes', *Times Educational Supplement*, 13th March 1998, p.25.

both by its interdisciplinary nature and by the intricacy of culture itself. The issue of arts practitioners' role in policy formation can thus be seen as one waiting to be investigated, and not one that has already been fully considered and resolved.

1.4 Using Public Policy Approaches in Cultural Policy Research

In order to investigate the second of my two questions, as to whether public policy approaches to policy formation might be useful for cultural policy research, I propose to examine in more detail Sabatier's article on top-down and bottom-up approaches to research; Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin's paper on interest groups' involvement in public policy; and an earlier discussion by Wyn Grant (1978) of 'insider' and 'outsider' groups from which Maloney et al develop their argument.

In 1986 Sabatier reviewed public policy literature which had been concerned over the previous fifteen years with the role of different actors in policy implementation, and particularly focused on the differences between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches. He explains these two models as stemming from the differences in their starting points: the former begins from a policy decision taken by government, whereas the latter focuses on a range of actors outside government who are involved in service-delivery. Sabatier's own strategy is to propose a synthesis of the two approaches, combining elements of both.[3]

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[3] Although Sabatier is concerned primarily with policy implementation, he does include policy-making in his analysis, and several of his observations and comments are applicable to the formation of policy. For instance he defines 'bottom-uppers' as being more concerned with "accurately mapping the strategies of actors concerned with a policy *problem*" than with "the extent to which a formally enacted policy *decision* is carried out" (p.36). Indeed, Ham and Hill (1993) warn against making too great a distinction between policy-making and implementation, pointing to the possibility of "the concretisation of policy in action, or [...] a process of

Sabatier summarises a number of criticisms of the top-down method, two of which are of particular relevance here. The first is that because "the framers of the policy decision" are seen as "the key actors", other actors are ignored or are seen as obstacles, and therefore their contributions are not recognised (Sabatier 1986, p.30). In the words of Ham and Hill (1993), in this model "policy is taken to be the *property* of policy-makers at the 'top' " (p.101, my emphasis). As we have seen, above, this view is reflected in some of research in the cultural policy field. (It should be noted, however, that not all those subscribing to the top-down view are so dismissive of the role of other actors. Hogwood and Gunn (1984) express what they describe as "a measure of sympathy" (p.207) towards the top-down approach even though, as already indicated, they do strongly recognise the participation of a range of interest groups.)

The second criticism levelled at the top-down model is that its use is limited "in situations where there is no dominant policy [...] or agency, but rather a multitude of governmental directives and actors" (Sabatier, p.30). This is indeed frequently the position in cultural policy, with local and national government, national and regional arts funders, and a plethora of arts organisations, individual artists and arts networks all playing a part in arts provision. The implication of these two points for cultural policy, therefore, is that any attempt to understand the policy process is limited unless it takes into account these other actors.

Grant's paper (1978) seeks to develop an analysis of interest groups which is focused on the strategies they adopt to reach their objectives, particularly in their

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movement back and forth between policy and action" (p.108). And revisiting this discussion four years later, Michael Hill goes so far as to say that in some situations the distinction between these two aspects of the policy process "seems singularly meaningless" (1997, p.381).

relations towards governments. He distinguishes between 'insider' and 'outsider groups': the former being those which are consulted by government in the policy-making process, while the latter "either do not wish to become enmeshed in a consultative relationship with officials or are unable to gain recognition as a group that should be consulted" (p.2). And he suggests that the designation of insider or outsider "status" is the result of "*both* a decision by government and a decision by the group concerned" (ibid., original emphasis). In terms of my discussion of the role of arts practitioners in policy formation, there are two key points here. One is that other actors besides government are involved in some stages of the policy-making process; and the other is that these actors can have at least some influence on the possibility of that involvement taking place.

Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin's work on interest groups and public policy (1994) aims to refine and develop the insider/outsider approach; and does so in the context of the role of consultation in policy formation. The authors, along with other policy analysts (e.g. Hogwood and Gunn 1984, p.53), argue that consultation is a key component of the policy-making process in Britain. Moreover, they put forward the view that, far from government being "some kind of citadel resisting invaders" (p.21), there is actually a strong inclination to engage others in policy-making, and not necessarily "only those groups with which it is predisposed to agree" (p.22). They assert that "consultation is a functional necessity in the process of developing effective policies" (ibid.). Therefore, non-governmental organisations are seen as having something useful to contribute to the process. Furthermore, the three authors indicate that consultation in Britain has grown more than threefold in the two decades from 1980. This is certainly reflected in the cultural sector where, from the early

1980s, there has been a "plethora of policy initiatives" (Taylor 1995, p.136), many of which have involved some form of consultation.

Maloney et al develop the concept of an "exchange-based" relationship between groups and government, in which "government offers groups the opportunity to shape public policy, while groups provide government with certain resources" (p.36). They describe as "resource-rich" those organisations which are able to offer a significant amount of expertise, advice, and information; are themselves organisationally cohesive and effective; and may additionally be economically, strategically, and numerically significant. Such organisations are sought out by government for their contribution.

This links to another point made by the authors, in which they distinguish between access and influence; or, as Grant puts it, "those groups which are invited [...] to submit their views" and "those which are at best tolerated" (p.3). Maloney et al suggest that access leads only to consultation in a limited sense, while influence results in groups being involved in bargaining and negotiating. In other words, points of view put forward by 'tolerated' groups during consultation might well not affect the resulting policy, in contrast to those with "privileged access" who are "in close regularised consultative relationship with decision makers" and thereby do have an influence on policy formation (p.25). Consequently, Maloney and his fellow researchers refine the term of insider to distinguish between these differences in access achieved by differing groups who nevertheless fall into the category of insider status; and they conclude that these distinctions are more significant—"the major cleavage in the group world"—than those between the notions of insider and outsider (p.37).

There is no doubt that the concept of an exchange-based relationship, in which the currency is resources, and where some organisations are more 'resource-rich' than others, is applicable to cultural policy and the role of arts practitioners in policy making. While a large number of arts organisations and artists are frequently invited to submit comments on policy issues, there is often a concentration on the views of certain organisations which are considered to be of key significance. My research has found many instances of consultations held to ascertain the views of arts practitioners both on broad arts strategy and on specific policy issues, where concern has been expressed by participants that elected members, appointees, and officers of funding bodies had focused on the large 'flagship' organisations, rather than the myriad of small groups that also produce art in their geographical or artform area. During the Arts Council's theatre review of 1999-2001, for example, the Independent Theatre Council, representing small-scale theatre companies, considered it necessary to take concerted action to focus attention on the needs of this part of the theatre sector alongside those of the larger repertory theatres which were the initial subject of the review. To this end it held discussions with the Arts Council, organised regional meetings, and urged its members to contribute to the debate.[4]

The model of access and influence is thus relevant to the question of arts practitioners' involvement in cultural policy-making. For it to be useful as well, it is necessary to consider whether the position of practitioners in such a situation is immutable, and if not, how it might be altered. As we have already seen, Grant is of the opinion that interest groups *are* able to take action which affects their relation to the policy-making process. Maloney and his fellow authors are less convinced of this.

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[4] Cf., for example, Independent Theatre Council, *ITC Policy Matters*, Issue 4, pp.1-2, July 2000.

In developing their argument Maloney et al distinguish between the strategies adopted by groups and the status conferred on them by government. They believe that strategies chosen by organisations to affect policy decisions (for example, public campaigning, the development of political skills, or behind-the-scenes activity) are less significant than the status accorded to organisations as a result of being 'resource-rich'. To back up this argument they suggest that resource-rich organisations would be unlikely to lose their status if they "behaved irresponsibly" (p.30). It does certainly seem to be the case in the cultural field that high-profile (resource-rich) organisations are able to squander those resources with considerable leniency from government.[5] Equally, there are many instances of arts organisations which, although cohesive, effective, and in possession of a high level of expertise in their chosen field of arts production, have been marginalised by their local council or regional arts body. In other words, the skills and reputation of the arts organisation in its own artistic field were insufficient to gain it external status.

However, pursuing the argument of Maloney et al to its logical conclusion, it should follow that organisations not yet regarded as resource-rich *could* increase their status with government by finding ways to increase their resources. This is one of the key ideas contained within the discussion in Part II of the thesis, where I examine the attempts of arts organisations to enlarge their influence on policy in this way. Such attempts include collaboration with other groups, i.e. increasing resources by amalgamating them, such as the joint work by the Theatre Writers' Union and Writers' Guild of Great Britain, or the creation of Coventry Theatre

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[5] For instance, it took many financial, management, and artistic problems in the 1990s at the high-profile, 'flagship' institution, the Covent Garden Royal Opera House, before MPs and government took decisive action to demand changes (Dan Glaister, 'Quality crisis at Royal Opera House', *Guardian*, 21st March 1998, p.15).

Network; raising the profile of the policy issue, as seen in the campaigning and advocacy activities of the playwrights' associations; and the development of research expertise by playwrights' organisations and theatre networks. It will be shown in my study that the strategy adopted by an arts organisation itself to increase its resources may thereby also enhance its status – although many arts organisations would testify that this is not easy to achieve.[6]

Maloney and his fellow authors also consider whether groups can, however, have complete freedom to choose their strategies. Drawing on other writers in their field, they suggest that both internal and external factors, such as groups' organisational structure, their source of funding, the nature of their policy demands, and changes in political administration, can affect and constrain the strategies which organisations are able to adopt. Grant, too, points to a range of factors which can influence an organisation's choice of strategy, and considers that external changes have the greatest effect. However, these authors are not suggesting that there is nothing that can be done by groups to affect their involvement in policy matters; and it is this potential for self-directed influence in gaining a place in policy-making that is worth pursuing by arts practitioners – and worth looking at by cultural policy researchers.

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[6] Conversely, as indicated above, even an organisation as resource-rich as the Covent Garden Royal Opera House found in the late 1990s and early 2000s that there may eventually be limits to the toleration by government of what it perceived as poor management and unacceptable exclusivity. Cf. Martin Wroe and Richard Brooks, 'In culture's hallowed halls, it's raining businessmen', *Observer*, 18th January 1998; Rosie Millard, 'What a song and dance', *Guardian*, 29th January 2000, p.24.

1.5 Conclusion

There are undoubtedly a number of useful concepts and analyses in these examples of public policy research on the role of organisations in policy-making. However, they cannot simply be applied wholesale to issues of cultural policy-making. To begin with, the points made earlier about the complex and contradictory nature of culture itself, counsel caution in treating cultural policy in the same way as other policy areas.

Furthermore, arts organisations have some important differences from many of the groups being discussed in these public policy analyses. Influencing and changing public policies is not simply a *part* of the activities of the latter, but in fact working for those changes is their raison d'etre. They are what Maloney et al call "idea or cause groups" (Maloney et al 1994, p.34).[7] In particular, these kinds of organisations are made up primarily of lay people who have an interest or a concern in the issue being promoted or opposed by them. They may also include some experts in the field – indeed, they often do – but the majority of their supporters or membership consists of non-specialists. In contrast, arts practitioners *are* specialists, and are concerned first and foremost with arts production. Their involvement, or wish to be involved, in policy-making stems from an interest in ensuring that they can continue to produce their art, and that conditions are favourable for both the production and distribution of that art. It is in this context that they may seek to change policies.

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[7] For example, Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin mention the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Amnesty International, while Sabatier refers to environmental campaigners.

However, looking more closely at the specific factor of intent to influence policy, this is prominent to differing degrees amongst the two categories of arts organisations (and individual practitioners) that will be investigated in this thesis. Focusing on the case of new theatre writing, there are, on the one hand, the theatre companies which are established to produce plays. These organisations' efforts to influence policy are therefore as a 'by-product' of their primary purpose. The other category is the playwriting associations set up precisely to affect both policy and practice in new writing. But unlike the membership of the 'idea' or 'cause' groups referred to above, these associations are made up almost entirely of specialists in their field. There is also a third type, which has grown out of the second: that is, those new writing organisations whose prime purpose is to support the development of new writing through activities such as workshops, readings, and financial assistance. The prominence of policy intervention thus varies among these different organisations, ranging from fairly high intent to being a by-product of their other objectives.

Regardless of which category they fall into, it is important to point out that most arts practitioners have a strong conviction of the value of culture and the arts, and that this informs not only their artistic production, but also their involvement in policy-making. The research in new playwriting policy undertaken for this thesis has found a commitment among the playwrights not only towards their own and their fellows' work, but also to the wider belief in the importance of new writing as a means of regenerating the theatre (to which in turn they are fully committed, as a powerful social forum for the benefit of their audiences and of society as a whole).

Nevertheless, the raison d'etre of arts practitioners is to produce their art, and, as already suggested, this distinguishes them from many of the groups who are the subject of public policy research. However, this difference, while suggesting that the analyses of public policy researchers cannot be applied automatically, does not mean that they cannot be applied at all. It is clear in this policy literature that the analysis of insider and outsider groups is applicable across a range of organisations, and it should therefore be possible to use it to understand the particular characteristics and circumstances of arts organisations.

In summary, public policy research provides some useful approaches to the analysis of cultural policy, though there needs to be caution in applying them, taking into account the particular complexities, cited earlier, of culture as distinct from other areas of public policy . There are also, as just noted, some important differences between arts organisations and groups involved in public policy issues.

Nonetheless, there are several, key, points to draw from these approaches to public policy. Firstly, that there are precedents for including practitioners in analyses of the policy process, and, furthermore, that such analyses of cultural policy processes will be incomplete if arts practitioners are excluded from consideration. Moreover, and importantly, these studies indicate that the role of practitioners need not be a passive one, but can be self-directed and active – both in terms of their contribution to the policy process itself, and in their ability to position, and re-position, themselves so that they can increase their contribution and its impact.

Finally, an important concept emerges from recognition of the involvement of a range of actors in the policy-making process: that is, the dynamic nature of that process. The interactions and exchanges amongst the different bodies involved are evident both at the moment of a particular consultation and in the longer-term process of engagement that provides and shapes the policy 'environment' in which all the actors operate. The picture that emerges of that environment and of the policy-making process itself is thus one of movement and action, rather than of stasis and passivity: a dynamics of policy creation. This will be discussed further, in Chapter 6 especially.

I suggested, above, two questions arising from an awareness that public policy research has considered the contribution of actors other than government in policy-making, where cultural policy research has not. There is another question which now needs to be answered. Can work be developed in cultural policy research to both analyse and theorise the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making?

The start of this chapter put forward the proposition that there has been a lack of such analysis in cultural policy research. It is not, however, the case that the issue of practitioner involvement has been totally absent from accounts of cultural policy developments in particular historical periods or artforms. Indeed, as will be illustrated in the following chapters, this question appears in a number of commentaries, histories, and reports. My argument is that the issue has been little analysed or theorised as a major part of the specific field of cultural policy research.

Some work of course has been done. As indicated already in this chapter, some writers in the field of cultural policy have considered aspects of the question of arts practitioners' role in policy activity. What is still needed, though, is a more focused examination of arts practitioners' involvement in the policy-making process, which makes it a central concern of study, and develops a theoretical framework in which to discuss the question. This thesis aims to provide such a study, by combining a historical account of debates about practitioner involvement in cultural policy activity with a detailed examination of the particular case of new playwriting policy in England, and an analytical and theoretical exploration of the issue.

The next chapter provides a historical perspective to the discussion, by tracing the emergence and continuation of concerns among both arts practitioners and a range of commentators about practitioners' role in the cultural policy process – concerns which have been voiced ever since the inauguration of state subsidy and the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945.

Chapter 2

A Brief History of Arts Practitioners in the Policy Process in Britain

The previous chapter considered the way in which cultural policy researchers in several continents have viewed practitioners in relation to cultural policy-making. This chapter gives an historic account of the role of arts practitioners in British cultural policy from 1945 onwards, and discusses some theoretical explanations of the developments.

It first deals with a common query in relation to cultural policy in Britain; namely, whether the British 'arm's length' approach of avoiding direct government intervention in culture has resulted in an absence of policy to which arts practitioners might actually relate.[1] This section of the chapter concludes that, despite this approach, there are nevertheless distinct policies which can be engaged with. The chapter then traces the involvement of arts practitioners in policy development and implementation at national, regional and local level, the attitudes towards that involvement, and debates around it. It also examines the effects of political and economic changes on the position of arts practitioners. Alongside this it considers theories about producers and consumers, and of professionalism, that help to explain both the role that practitioners have played and the perception of that role.

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[1] The arm's length approach is the system by which government keeps a distance from detailed policy and grant-making activities by appointing semi-independent bodies ('quangos') to undertake this work. The arm's length principle is employed widely across public policy in most Western countries as a means of restraining governmental powers. In the cultural field it has been regarded as an important buffer between government and the arts, preventing political interference or diktat in artistic matters. Harry Hillman-Chartrand and Claire McCaughey describe it as "the most effective guarantee that in a democratic country the arts will not be crushed under the tyranny of present-day commercial, moral or political concerns" (1989, pp.73-74).

2.1 Does Britain Have Cultural Policies?

Before considering the history of arts practitioner's involvement in cultural policy-making, a common query about cultural policy in Britain needs to be answered: that is, whether there have in fact been cultural policies in this country for practitioners to take part in creating. This question has been posed particularly in relation to the Arts Council, in its capacity as the government's 'arm's length' body responsible for making decisions about the organisation and funding of the arts.

When John Maynard Keynes (who had played the key role in establishing the Arts Council of Great Britain) made his BBC broadcast on the setting up of the Council in 1945, he referred to the event as "half baked", and that tends to be the manner in which Britain's relation to cultural policy is widely perceived, especially in contrast to the cultural policies developed in many other countries. Of course, the Royal Charter which established the Council contained specific aims, and Keynes' broadcast speech was printed in *The Listener* under the title of 'The Arts Council: Its Policy and Hopes' (Keynes 1945). But, despite discussions of policy matters in both the Council's annual and occasional reports, there has been a commonly held view that no clear policy was developed after 1945, and that "the concept of a master plan and policy for the arts was seen by members of the Arts Council not only as inadvisable, but as risky and wrong" (Keller 1983, p.9).

The 1965 White Paper, 'A Policy for the Arts: The First Steps', developed by the Labour Government's Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee, has been described as "the first formal statement of the role of government in the arts" (Gray 2000,

p.50). But the White Paper itself stated that state support for the arts had "grown up in response to spasmodic pressures rather than as a result of a coherent plan", and stressed that it would "take time" to develop policy "in full detail" (Cmnd 2601, 1965, p.16). This lack of certainty surrounding public policy for the arts in Britain continued in the years to follow.

In their examination of the policy statements contained in the Arts Council's annual reports, Karen King and Mark Blaug (1973) pinpoint both haziness, for example in the Council's discussions of 'diffusion' of the arts, and actual contradictions, such as over its policy on ticket prices. In response to the Arts Council's assertion, in 1953, that it "must select its role and objectives with precision", King and Blaug assert that they have difficulty in finding evidence that the Council has actually done this (King and Blaug, p.9), and later state that if "there are underlying principles or guidelines to decisions, the Arts Council has appeared remarkably reluctant to give an account of them" (p.14). In the annual report of 1966/67, the Chairman of the Arts Council, Lord Goodman, though referring several times to Council policy and even to "firm policy", nevertheless ends his introduction with the statement that "We shall try to make our judgements more scientific and less rule-of-thumb, but to a large extent they must remain inspirational" (ACGB 1967, p.[2] of 'A chairman's note'). King and Blaug conclude in apparent despair: "It is not too much to say that in 26 years of official reportage they have failed to produce a single coherent and operational statement of their aims" (King and Blaug, p.16).

Their view was echoed nearly a decade later in Robert Hutchison's assessment of Arts Council policies as "typically [...] too vague, too ambiguous" (1982, p.152). And at about the same time, Jim McGuigan (1981) was similarly charting the

lack of clear policy in the specifics of the Arts Council's policy on literature. In his discussion of the basis on which literature panel decisions are taken regarding grants to writers, he questions the panel's clarity in relation to what they mean by 'serious writing' (this is the term used to distinguish which writers will be grant-supported by the Council). He suggests that "one would expect a certain willingness among decision-makers [...] to make explicit a concept which is so fundamental to the normal operations of the grant system" (p.94). But in his investigations he found that "almost every interviewee was unhappy about defining 'serious writing' " (ibid.). He concludes that the term is "an empty abstraction", and that it was actually the individual tastes of literature panel members which produced the decisions of the panel (p.96).

Revealingly, in a response to King and Blaug's paper, Richard Findlater (a member of the Drama Panel), far from contradicting their criticisms, defends the Arts Council's lack of precise policy and clear targets (Findlater 1973). Partly, he bases this viewpoint on the smallness of the Council's budget (though this view hardly stands up to scrutiny: his statement that with few funds in 1945 it could not be expected to "declare a precise series of targets" (pp.91-92) is somewhat undermined by the ring-fencing that took place then in order to secure a large grant for the Covent Garden Opera House.) But most of all, Findlater rejects the idea of what he calls 'theories': "theories of what arts are more important than others; of what principles should govern public subsidy; of what artists should be subsidised in preference to others" (p.92). The reason for this is to protect the arts from "interference from the state" (ibid.). This is, of course, the same rationale that was behind the creation of the Arts Council on the basis of the 'arm's length' principle. Several decades after this founding, commentators still point to "the lack of any coherent national strategy or policy for the arts" (Gray 2000, p.75).

However, despite the vagueness of Arts Council policies, and the resistance to a centralised and national policy for the arts (which might produce a state interference both unwanted by artists and problematic for politicians who prefer not to have to defend artistic decisions in the House of Commons), there are of course many statements of value and intent, and many decisions taken, regarding the funding, organisation, distribution and purpose of the arts, both in the arts funding system and at local government level. Despite his criticisms regarding serious writing, McGuigan refers elsewhere in his report to the "literature policy" of the Arts Council (McGuigan 1981, e.g. pp.23, 26, 33); while Brown and Brannen (1996), assessing the impact of the Arts Council's Cork Report on theatre, believe it "made a case" for the public funding of theatre (p.371) and refer to the "principles" of the report (p.375). They conclude that the report had "continued for ten years to provide a means of understanding and developing English theatre" (p.383).

Furthermore, some leading figures in the Arts Council have themselves argued for a recognition of the existence and importance of policy. Roy Shaw, writing as General-Secretary in the annual report for 1975/76, resists the idea that the Council does not have a policy, contending that it "in fact frequently take[s] initiatives" (p.8), and going on to suggest that "the only choice is really between a conscious policy and an unconscious one" (p.9). Elaborating on this point a few years later, at a conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils, he argued that it is actually not possible to be without one, saying "that not to have a policy is to have a policy" (Sweeting 1982, p.81). Intriguingly, Richard Findlater – quoted above rejecting the notion of Arts Council policy – had also written, fourteen years earlier in an Arts Council annual report, of the Council's "deliberate act of policy" in setting up schemes to support new theatre writing (ACGB 1959, p.11).

This view is reiterated by Roy Shaw as, in his discussion of whether the Arts Council in fact has policies, he cites its support for new playwrights as an example of the initiatives which the Council had taken and which he offers as proof of policy-making (ACGB 1976, p.8).

There is still a justifiable criticism to be made that, for at least a large part of its existence, the Arts Council's policies have not been very clear, or have consisted of fragments related to specific artforms and not necessarily to one another. But even with these qualifications, and certainly, as the Arts Council has moved more deliberately towards establishing policies, it is pertinent to consider how these policies are created and by whom. For whether overt or implicit, general or specific, decisions *are* taken and statements made (as will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4); and it is in relation to these decision-making processes and the people involved in them that the question of arts practitioners' role in policy-making arises.

2.2 Arts Practitioners and Policy-making Since 1945

In his study of British cultural politics, Robert Hewison (1995) has described how, when the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was turned into the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945, the artform panels – which until then had executive power – were transformed into advisory bodies. The cause of this change was pressure from CEMA's chairman, John Maynard Keynes, who had earlier experienced argument and resistance from the drama panel (for example over their policy of organising theatre tours (Hewison,

p.39)).[2] The result of it was "that the Arts Council was always to give the appearance of consulting the experts in the respective art forms [...] but the real power of decision lay with the members of the Council and their executive officers" (Hewison, p.42).

From its inception in 1945 the Arts Council, as a governing body, was structured as a top-down pyramid and consisted of a Council, advisory panels, and various sub-committees, all of whose members were unpaid. The day-to-day work was undertaken by paid staff.[3] The panels were each concerned with a particular artform (drama, music, etc) and, as the organisation grew, they spawned their own sub-committees to deal with specific aspects of their remit. Thus in 1995 the drama panel had two sub-committees: 'drama projects' and 'theatre writing and bursaries'; music had one, for the Contemporary Music Network; while the visual arts panel had three, for arts projects, photography, and architecture. There were also other committees, (some later renamed as panels) dealing with particular areas of work such as touring and education, which cut across the different artforms. The role of the panels, committees, and sub-committees was to make recommendations within their sphere, mainly about grants to arts organisations and individual artists. Final decisions were, officially, the responsibility of the Council itself.

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[2] Keynes was hostile to CEMA's approach of setting up and managing tours itself; and tried, with difficulty, to get CEMA to give financial support to a tour organised by actor-manager Donald Wolfit.

[3] The size of the organisation, in terms of the number and size both of panels and committees, and of the departments and staff, varied considerably over the years – growing as the Council's Treasury grant increased and demands on the Council expanded, and then at times reducing as attempts were made to prune growth that was becoming unmanageable. Thus the seven Council, panel, and committee bodies with which the Arts Council began in 1945 grew to 74 by 1975, while the number of people serving on them rose from 63 to 786. Twenty years later the number of bodies was 58, with 528 members (Witts 1998, pp.[548-53]).

The Council members were not, predominantly, practising artists. An analysis of the make-up of Arts Council in its first two decades (Harris 1969) points out that just under twenty per cent of Council members were or had been practising artists, (although others had involvement in the arts in other ways, either in management of arts organisations or as writers alongside another career). What is striking about the thirteen artists listed by Harris is the extent to which they were high-profile figures; including, for example, Henry Moore, C. Day Lewis, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Indeed Vaughan Williams himself, during the setting up of the Arts Council in 1945, argued – unsuccessfully – for "the recruitment of workaday artists rather than distinguished names" (Witts, p.150).

Hewison describes the Arts Council and its main clients as being a part of the "natural territory of the Great and the Good" – that body of individuals widely recognised as holding key positions in administering all aspects of the state, including culture. He refers to the "intimate connections" that existed between government and the major arts organisations, for instance between the Treasury and the Royal Opera House (p.79). In his account of his time as Minister for the Arts, in the 1970s, Hugh Jenkins gives an indication of the way in which contacts between Government and the Arts Council, particularly between members of the Cabinet and the Arts Council Chairman, operated to maintain what he described as "the grip of the snobocracy on the arts scene" (Jenkins 1979, pp.204-5). Exceptions did occur: Norman St John-Stevas claimed that, as Minister for the Arts, he was not consulted by the Arts Council when they proposed the axing of 41 companies in 1980 (Hutchison 1982, p.17). But generally, the links between the leading members of government and Council were close: of people who inhabited the same social and political circle, with ties through marriage, friendship and profession.

Robert Hutchison (1982) also details the close connections between the Arts Council and the major arts organisations. He cites, for example, the fact that all seven chairmen of the Council had been on the governing bodies of one or even both of the national opera companies, and that the Royal Opera House's accountant, D.P.Lund, spent fourteen years (from 1951 to 1965) being, at the same time, accountant of the Arts Council. Richard Witts describes how Lund would write letters to himself, in his two roles, and "joked that he saved both outfits postage by carrying the envelopes and cheques in his briefcase as he walked between offices to hand the letter from himself to himself" (Witts, p.252). Similarly, Janet Minihan (1977) conjures up the image of John Maynard Keynes taking enjoyment in "negotiating with himself" while holding simultaneously the chairmanship of both the Arts Council and the Covent Garden Opera Trust (p.234).

It would be hard, in such circumstances, to interpret as merely coincidental the fact that in 1945 the Arts Council granted the Covent Garden Trust £25,000, more than a tenth of the Council's budget; while, astonishingly, in the 1950s and 1960s at least a third of the Council's money was being given to Covent Garden. (This particular relationship continued to be a close one for many years. Indeed, in almost a mirror-image of the early links between the Arts Council and the Royal Opera House, the 1990s saw the first major capital grant of the Council's Lottery fund awarded to the Opera House, with both the chairman of the Council's Lottery committee and the secretary-general of the Arts Council subsequently moving to become the Opera House's chairman and chief executive respectively.)

At this crucial point then, when the public arts funding system in Britain was being created, in a mould which would hold for decades to come, practitioners – as a general body – were excluded from the policy-making bodies and from the committees implementing those policies. And the close connections amongst, and narrow range of, practitioners who held positions in those processes, gave rise to the oft-repeated assertion (in the arts themselves, in the media, and, as indicated in Chapter 1, in the study of cultural policy) that a small elite of artists was feathering its own nest and that of its friends.

This limited group of the 'great and good', continued to hold sway over arts policy in the ensuing years. Over thirty per cent of Council members up to 1966 had attended the top public schools in Britain (Harris 1969); by 1981 two-thirds of those who had held the posts of Arts Minister or Arts Council chairman were also former pupils of leading public schools (Hutchison 1982); and in 1997 the situation that Council Chairmen were public-school educated still held true, with all but one also having been to Oxbridge (Witts, p.457). Family and business links were also strong among those holding these positions, and wealth and titles were not unusual. Of the ten Arts Council Chairmen from 1945 up to 1997 two were hereditary peers and three were knights when they were appointed (Witts, p.457). In 1965 Hugh Jenkins, then a back-bench MP, was moved to say that he "doubted whether any weekly-wage earner ever entered the Arts Council's building except for the purpose of cleaning it" (Jenkins 1979, p.56).

From the late 1960s there was some, though limited, recognition within the Arts Council of the narrowness of its make-up, and attempts were made from the inside to broaden it. Some of these concerns focused on the London-centric composition of the Council and its panels and sub-committees, and suggestions

were put forward for regional representation. However, a joint Arts Council/RAA working group making such propositions in 1980 was moved to state that "we feel bound to remark that similar recommendations have been made in the past [...] but in practice there has been very little change. We do not regard this as satisfactory" (ACGB 1980b, pp.17-18). The age-range of Council members was also a subject of concern and some attempt was made briefly to widen it. Thus the 1968/69 Annual Report refers to "youngsters" who had been brought onto its panels, and to the need to "remain contemporary and 'with it' " (ACGB 1969, p.[3] of 'A Chairman's Introduction'). However, such variations and recommendations did not substantially alter the Council, and in terms of representation of arts practitioners the proportion of practising artists on the Council remained on average, up to 1997 at least, at the twenty per cent noted by Harris in 1969. Nor did these attempts substantially reduce the criticisms.

It was not only who was on the Council, but the way in which people became members, which is significant. The system was from the outset one of appointment, from the top down. The Chairman of the Council was chosen by the Government Minister responsible for the arts, and other appointments were made through a combination of recommendation, discussion and negotiation with chairs and members of the relevant bodies, according to what level of body the appointment was for. The top-down nature of the procedure meant, for example, that the chairs of panels were not chosen by their own panel members. In an article written in *Political Quarterly*, out of his own experience of being on the Arts Council, Raymond Williams describes this process as being "shrouded in [...] mellow dusk" (Williams 1979, p.160). He refers to names 'emerging' and to private consultations taking place. A similar picture is drawn by Jim McGuigan in relation to the Arts Council's literature panel. He refers to "a

process of consultation over which the Literature Director and Panel Chairman have a decisive influence" (McGuigan 1981, p.43), and quotes a former panel member describing it as "an entirely arbitrary process [...] some form of old boys' network really" (p.45).

Thus, a body in which influential personal connections held sway was perpetuated through a system that had no transparency and very little democracy. Some commentators suggest that even assessments such as Hewison's above that the power rested in the Council, with only an appearance of panel involvement, was over-generous. Raymond Williams recounts how decisions of policy were made almost entirely without voting, and sometimes without being referred from the panels to the Council itself. He concluded that it was the voices of the Arts Council's officers, panel chairmen, the finance committee members (again, selectively appointed), and the Council chairman which were influential in policy-making, and that the "lay Council, and even more the lay Panels, come through as interested occasional parties" (1979, p.162). Robert Hutchison similarly points out that on "major policy questions the system of panels and committees is often by-passed", with, for example, matters relating to the Council's large opera subsidy having "frequently been played close to the chests of senior Arts Council members and directors" (1982, p.35).

This discussion has focused so far on the Arts Council because it is the pivot around which the arts funding system, particularly as it affects the performing arts, has operated in Britain since 1945. The arm's length system, keeping government at a distance from the detailed policy and grant-making activities of its appointed quango, means that the focus of debate, criticism, and attempts at influence at a national level was the Arts Council; and this continued to be the

case even when a ministry for the arts was finally created in 1992. (The Department for National Heritage (DNH) was established by the Conservative Government and in 1997 was transformed into the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) by the Labour Government.)

This is not to say, however, that there has been no comment or activity by practitioners in relation to the DNH or DCMS. Along with academic and media commentators,[4] arts workers have been especially critical of these bodies when they were perceived to be taking a more proactive role towards arts policy, and particularly when this involved setting parameters and goals that concerned governmental objectives not directly related to the arts (for example, tackling social exclusion), in which the Government expected arts activities to be undertaken. Some attempts have also been made by arts practitioners to affect policy at the ministerial level. For instance, the National Campaign for the Arts organised a series of meetings in 1999 and 2000 in which delegations of practitioners met with the Arts Minister (at that time, Alan Howarth) to discuss matters such as artistic innovation, training, audience development, and funding. They have also participated in consultations initiated by the ministry, such as that undertaken in 1998 as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, in which direct responses were invited on a range of issues relating to the arts funding system and the objectives of arts provision. However, as detailed policies and funding decisions are still the remit of the Arts Council, the main attention has continued largely to be directed towards that body.

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[4] For example, Quinn 1997, p.152; Hugo Young, 'Culture? No, these people prefer to be seen with Noel Gallagher', *Guardian*, 21st May 1998, p.20; Liz Hill and Brian Whitehead, 'Arts for art's sake?', *ArtsBusiness*, editorial 22nd November 1999, p.2.

In addition to operations at a national level, public policy and funding for the arts has also resided in the English Regional Arts Boards (and their predecessors, the Regional Arts Associations), and in local government. This section therefore concludes by also considering the role of arts practitioners in these arenas.

The first Regional Arts Association (RAA) was formed in 1956, in the wake of the Arts Council's closure of its regional offices between 1952 and 1956. Established in the South West region, it managed to persuade the Arts Council to support it financially despite the Council having just ended its own operations in the regions. When another Association was set up in the North East of England in 1961, it was on the basis of substantial support from the local authorities in its area; and it then requested the Arts Council to provide matching funds. During the 1960s and 1970s the combination of local authority and Arts Council funding of the RAAs became the main pattern of support, which was still the case for most of the Regional Arts Boards (RABs) that succeeded the Associations in 1991 and 1992. (There were by then twelve English RAAs, which were formed into ten RABs.) The pattern of representation though did not reflect that of funding: Arts Council representation was variable, and sometimes minimal,[5] while local authorities – contributing a minor portion of the funds – made up a significant proportion of the Associations' governing bodies.The RAAs/RABs also had individuals and local organisations (including both professional and amateur arts organisations, artists' trade unions, and some educational institutions and businesses) in their membership. Representatives of these, as well as individual members, could be elected to the RAAs/RABs' governing

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[5] The report of the joint ACGB/RAA working group into relations between the Arts Council and the Associations (ACGB 1980b) noted that the Arts Council, "despite its very substantial input of funds" had been "unable to provide an assessor to cover all RAA meetings" (p.12).

bodies. Arts practitioners also served on regional advisory panels, though this system was later replaced at some RABs by a pool of individual advisors who could be asked for their opinion on specific artists or arts organisations.

The view of the arts funding system, expressed in the report of the joint Arts Council/RAA working group, was that "on the members rests the responsibility for the formulation and implementation of a coherent regional policy" (ACGB 1980b, p.3). But the same report also referred critically to "arguments in favour of increasing democratic participation", and argued that "there should be specific limits defined for the participation and influence of such a membership" (p.11). These limits would "ensure that nominees of national and local funding bodies jointly constitute an overall majority at all times on the ultimate governing bodies of the RAAs" and that the Associations' General Meetings, where individual and corporate members participated, "should not include the authority to over-rule decisions of the governing body" (p.16).

Given this outlook it is not surprising if RAA members tried sometimes to take matters into their own hands. Hutchison describes an instance in 1980 where an attempt was made in Merseyside by individual Association members to obtain a majority on the Executive Committee. The response to this action was the closure, and then reconstitution, of the Association by its funders (Hutchison 1982, p.131). However, on the whole, demands for better representation in the regional arena do not seem to have been made on the same scale as they were in relation to the Arts Council. With at least some form of membership and representation at the regional level (according to ERAB – the English Regional Arts Boards co-ordinating organisation – there were always several arts

practitioners on each RAB Board[6]) the question of arts practitioner involvement seems mostly to have manifested itself rather differently than its expression in the national arena. Indeed there were times when the membership showed a close identification with its regional board. For instance, the members of the West Midlands RAB took a very proactive stance in its defence when the 2002-3 reorganisation of the Arts Council altered the status of the independent Regional Arts Boards (although it is worth noting that of course in this case it was the Arts Council again that was on the receiving end of the members' sharp criticisms).

Nevertheless, despite these differences between the national and regional arenas, there *were* criticisms by arts practitioners of the extent to which practitioners' views were sought and considered when policy was made at a regional level, as will be shown later in the thesis.

Unlike the Arts Council and the RAAs/RABs, local authorities are of course elected. While individual councillors may have, or develop, specific interests in the arts, they tend to be reliant on their specialist officers for information and advice on arts policy. The extent to which either councillors or officers have consulted with arts practitioners varies according to local circumstances, the individual approaches of the councillors and officers, and the political situation of the time. It also, of course, depends on whether a local authority even has an arts budget; and as a result of arts spending being a discretionary part of local government, a few local councils do not spend anything on the arts (ACE 1996b, p.23). That the involvement of arts practitioners in local authority arts policy cannot be more precisely defined is borne out by the vagueness of the paragraphs

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[6] Correspondence with the author, March 2002.

concerning this issue in the National Arts and Media Strategy Discussion Document on local government and the arts (Challans, 1991). In this paper Tim Challans refers to a number of different ways in which local councils have sought opinion, and suggests that there are "mixed views about the value of involving artists and other experts to feed into decision making [...] there is no fixed solution to the issue" (p.13).

The participation of arts practitioners in local government cultural policy-making will be discussed further in Part II; but it is useful to note here Challans' conclusion on this subject. He sums up by saying that "as long as the process does not delay decision-making, there are good reasons for the greater involvement of artists and practitioners" (p.13). While not expressing opposition to the idea, it is not exactly whole-hearted. Certainly, as a general rule, there has been no formal involvement or representation of arts practitioners in local authority cultural policy-making bodies.

In conclusion then, the structures through which the arts have been publicly funded in Britain since the Second World War have neither promoted a case for arts practitioners to be involved in policy-making, nor provided the mechanisms for them to do so, other than as specific, selected, individuals. As will be seen in the following section, the Arts Council has been the prime focus of demands for change, and has shown a marked reluctance to alter the situation. For artists and arts organisations have not simply submitted to this state of affairs, but have argued the case for more – and more representative – involvement in cultural policy making.

2.3 Calls for More Practitioner Involvement

As has already been seen, only a limited number and range of arts practitioners were given a role in policy-making, but even in the early days of the Arts Council there were calls for greater participation, especially involving some form of direct representation. In addition to Vaughan Williams' protest, referred to earlier, the House of Commons Select Committee on Estimates, of 1948/9, recommended greater democracy in the operations of the Council, with Equity (the trade union for actors) proposing in its evidence to the Committee that the panels should have some members elected by artists' bodies and that the panels should in turn elect representatives on to the Council itself and have "a more definite role in the functioning of the Arts Council as a whole" (House of Commons 1949, p.159).

One of the factors affecting the limited involvement of arts practitioners was the relatively narrow range of arts with which the Arts Council concerned itself. The Royal Charter establishing the Council in 1946 referred specifically to the 'fine arts', and the bulk of its money in the early years was given to the major professional arts organisations, particularly in the performing arts. Some art forms, such as jazz and folk music, were excluded altogether (with jazz receiving its first small grant only in 1967), while amateur arts in its entirety went unsupported (Hutchison and Feist 1991). Thus, in addition to the points already made regarding the composition of the members of the Arts Council, this focus on the 'high' arts inevitably narrowed the range of practitioners who might be drawn on to take part in policy-making.

However, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, a range of debates and developments took place, which challenged the limited definition of the arts, widened the debate on access, and gave voice to a wider range of arts practitioners. They included community arts, working class writers, cultural diversity, experimental theatre and theatre in experimental places, and engagement with new media and technologies.

Community arts emerged in the mid-1960s, and spread to many areas of the country, embracing video projects, street arts, children's playschemes, festivals and celebrations. By 1973 there were sufficient numbers of organisations and individuals engaged in the range of activities that came under the community arts umbrella for the Arts Council to be aware, at least, of an increasing level of demand for financial support from it. The Council therefore formed a working party, which produced a report (ACGB, 1974)) recommending a small increase in funding for this area of activity and the setting up of a specialist panel. Although a committee was established, the challenge put forward by this new arts sector was not simply for a piece of the existing 'cake', but was aimed at the cake itself: deep criticisms were made of the Arts Council's focus on 'high' culture, which was rejected as not simply inaccessible to the majority of people, but actually irrelevant to them (Braden, 1978).

In another development, during the 1970s, groups of working class writers and community publishers produced a range of fictional and non-fictional writing, organised public readings of their work, provided workshops, gave advice, and published literary magazines. Together, they formed the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. Their approach was seen by the Arts Council's Literature Department as being out of line with the literary standards to

which the Department was accustomed, and applications for support from the Federation were repeatedly rejected by the Literature Panel. In an open letter to Melvyn Bragg, the Chairman of the Literature Panel, the Federation concluded that the Arts Council's refusals were based not on literary quality, but on an objection to their focus on working class writers and their collective way of working "rather than on the traditional concept of the artist-in-a-garret" (Hutchison 1982, pp.185-6).

In the theatre sector, there was a huge upsurge of activity, both inside and outside theatre buildings. New companies were formed, which both organised themselves in new ways and explored different ways of presenting theatre works; and new audiences were sought. Between 1968 and 1978 "half a dozen 'fringe' theatre groups" grew to "well over a hundred 'alternative' theatre companies, plus another fifty or more young people's theatre companies", while "a handful of playwrights" had increased to "at least 250" working in the alternative theatre (Itzin, 1980, p.xiv). It was an "era of instant theatre, on any issue, created by anyone, in any style, performed anywhere"; and there was a "radical, flamboyant, egalitarian edge to the work" (Chambers and Prior 1987, p.17). Many of the companies presented work which was concerned with political and social issues, and sought to open up questions about the role and nature of theatre in society.

One of the reactions of the Arts Council to these developments was to set up a 'New Activities' Sub-committee, in 1968, which then became the New Activities Committee, which in turn was replaced in 1970 by the Experimental Projects Committee. The latter, "not being chaired by an Arts Council member [...] was effectively downgraded" (Hutchison 1982, p.110), and lasted only to the end of

1973. But these 'new activities' could not simply be confined to artform concerns or tucked away in extra sub-committees.

These developments in the arts and culture were themselves part of a broader change in society at the time, a change which challenged authority, tradition, standards and values. It is therefore not surprising that, in addition to experiments in the content and form of the arts themselves, attempts were made to question and alter the way in which the arts were administered.

Hutchison describes how, in the late 1960s, the mischievously-named Friends of the Arts Council Operative "invaded a meeting of the New Activities Committee [...] to present a case for replacing that Committee with an Artists' Panel" (Hutchison 1982, p.106); while in 1969 a conference of 350 artists of all kinds criticised the Arts Council for its " 'indifference, ignorance and irrelevance to the real need of living artists'." (ibid). In 1975 a meeting of playwrights and small theatre companies, organised by the newly-formed Independent Theatre Council and The Association of Community Theatres, called for more openness in Arts Council proceedings and for artists' organisations to be able to send observers to meetings (Itzin, p.213). During the 1970s arguments were also put forward by authors for greater representation on the literature panel of the Arts Council, in order to make the system more open. Members of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, including a former literature panel member, suggested that representatives could be elected from organisations like their own (McGuigan, 1981). Some of these arguments were reflected in a written debate in the pages of *Theatre Quarterly*, which was opened by a former member of the Arts Council Drama Panel with a sharp attack on various aspects of the organisation's operations, including the appointment of panel members (Griffiths, 1977). The

article drew detailed responses from the Council's Secretary-General (Shaw 1977, pp.86-88) and its Drama Department (Andrews 1977, pp.88-91), as well as contributions from two theatre critics, one of whom had also sat on the Drama Panel (Marcus 1977, pp.91-2; Elsom 1977, pp.92-4).

In the mid-1970s the Minister for the Arts, Hugh Jenkins, was himself in favour of reforming the Arts Council, and describes in his account of his time in the post how he unsuccessfully tried to make changes in the organisation, but was thwarted by the Chairman of the Arts Council, senior members of government and civil servants (Jenkins 1979, pp.204-5). In 1977 the Labour Party produced a policy document arguing for "the creation of a democratic structure for the administration and finance of the arts" (*The Arts and the People: Labour's Policy towards the Arts*, p.6), and for the involvement of arts workers in policy-making. In the following year the Conservatives produced a document opposing such ideas (Conservative Political Centre 1978). A review of the two parties' proposals (Wilford 1979) was of the opinion that it was their differing attitudes to the decision-making process that provided the greatest distinction in their approaches to the Arts Council.

In his *Political Quarterly* article Raymond Williams, too, proposed a system which would include artists, specifically elected on a representative basis (Williams 1979, p.170). Hugh Jenkins' appointment of Williams to membership of the Council led to a special conference on matters of the Council's constitution and policy, as a result of Williams' persistent arguments. The conference, held in May 1978, in turn led to the setting up of a working party to look into the operations and structure of the Arts Council. But, reporting in 1979, the working group dismissed any idea of elected or representative membership of the Council

and its panels, warning that if it did "move in this direction [...] the effect will certainly be to create a wholly different type of Council" (ACGB 1979b, pp.26-27), which is presumably what the proposers of such changes had in mind. The working party also argued for the continuation of the panels' advisory role.

By the end of the 1970s there had been little change in the organisation of the arts system, despite all these efforts. Questions related to decision-taking and policy-making processes, and the involvement of arts practitioners in these, were evidently still a focus for debate at the end of the decade, forming a significant part of a conference of Commonwealth Arts Councils held in 1979 (Battersby, 1981), and was still a topic of discussion at their second meeting two years later (Sweeting, 1982). In 1981 *Political Quarterly* carried another article about the role and procedures of the Arts Council, referring to several contributions to the debate on arts practitioners' representation in newspapers and journals in the preceding eighteen months, which indicated that the issue had not been resolved (Dormer, 1981). And the situation did not change markedly in the following decades, particularly in terms of the formal structures of the Arts Council.

There are a number of reasons for this continuing lack of change, and not only because leading members of the Arts Council and their supporters in the establishment were resistant to reform. Over the next twenty years the attempts by practitioners to have some influence over policy-making took place in quite different circumstances – circumstances that were affected by the changes taking place in the political life of the country from the late 1970s.

2.4 New Circumstances and a New Discourse

The political consensus of the post-war period, which saw broad agreement across the parties for the public provision of a range of services, collapsed under the monetarist Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, with their ideological opposition to a strong governmental role in such provision, their promotion of the individual and hostility to the social and collective, and their belief in the benefits of an unregulated market. Their aim was to produce not just a market economy, but a market society, in which the economic sphere is predominant throughout all aspects of society (Gray 1999, p.12).

This significant and thorough-going change prevented the openings provided by the 1960s and early 1970s from being followed through in the cultural field, as well as in most other public services, in the ways envisaged by their proponents. In fact, one of the successes of the Thatcherite programme was the manner in which it took up some of these arguments and turned them to its own purposes. Thus, criticisms of the way public arts funding was organised were transmuted into an attack on the concept of public arts funding itself. The fact that people from within the arts had been critical of the system (even though from a different standpoint and with a differing goal from the Conservatives) meant that they were in a weakened position to defend it.

A number of specific aspects of this major shift affected the arts and culture. These were: marketisation and economic recession; the changes in emphasis from producers to consumers; and the undermining of professionalism and trade unionism.

2.4.1 The Arts, Marketisation, and Economic Attrition

The Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s oversaw a steady wearing away of public funding for the arts in Britain. This took both an ideological and economic form. The ideology was clearly expressed in the statement by St John-Stevas, Minister for the Arts in the first Thatcher government, that business sponsorship of the arts was "an idea whose time has come" (Shaw 1993, p.14). And he warned that "state-side expansion has come to an end. We must look to the private sector for new sources of money."[7]

Economically, the attack was manifested in the reduction of the Treasury budget for the arts and through cuts in local government spending, with the governments' ideological drive being compounded by the exigencies of an economic recession. The Conservative-appointed chairman of the Arts Council from 1982 to 1989, William Rees-Mogg, accepted these restrictions; and, reflecting later on his time in the post, stated that he was "very concerned to lower arts companies' expectations about funding".[8] Using both the Retail Price Index (RPI) and Average Earnings Index, as well as taking into account other factors such as expenditure on the new British Library building, Hewison concludes that the Arts Council's grant from the Treasury fell by nineteen per cent in the decade from 1979 to 1989 (Hewison 1995, p.247). The Arts Council itself, with figures based on the RPI, showed expenditure at virtually standstill levels between 1986 and 1991, and after a rise in 1991/2 and marginally in 1992/3, a drop in every year up to and including 1997/8 (ACE 2000a, pp.31-32). (After the Labour Party won the General Election in 1997, their announcement

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[7] Frances Gibb, 'Conservatives put accent on private arts patronage', *Daily Telegraph*, 18th June 1979, p.10.
[8] William Rees-Mogg, 'Affording art for all', *The Times*, 15th July 1993, p.16.

that they would continue to operate the Conservatives' public expenditure plans for their first two years in office, which led to a further cut in the Treasury grant to the Arts Council in 1998/9, caused widespread dismay in the arts community and further afield.)

During much of this time local government spending reductions also led to a squeeze on the arts. This was due especially to the discretionary nature of local council expenditure on culture, which meant that arts funding – already very variable across local authorities – was vulnerable when reduced budgets were stretched to meet statutory duties. Challans (1991) refers to the "widespread gloom" about local authority support for the arts at the time he was writing – a situation that included the example of Derbyshire, where the whole of the budget for the arts was cut (p.10); and this trend continued as the decade went on (Kawashima 1997a, p.33).

The widely-felt effects of these cuts have been documented by many commentators. Oliver Bennett counts it as one of the key factors contributing to concerns expressed across the arts and media during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and suggests there was an acute sense of crisis and beleaguerment among those working in the arts at that time (Bennett 1995, pp.199-200). David Edgar (1993) concludes that the economic stringency of this period had a direct effect on both the content of theatre and on the working conditions of theatre practitioners. With regard to the artistic work itself, he points to the decline in new plays as a proportion of the total theatre repertoire during the late 1980s, from 12% to 7%, suggesting that concerns about maximising box office receipts led to a reluctance to programme 'risky' new work. (Edgar is not of the opinion that the fall in new play production was entirely economically driven. He also,

rightly in my view, attributes 'safe programming' to the wider ideological drives of the Thatcher period.)

At the same time the conditions of employment for theatre workers declined. Shorter seasons, smaller casts, and more temporary contracts led to fewer and more insecure working weeks in the theatre for its workers. Between 1983 and 1993 there was a drop of 21% in working weeks of actors at regional building-based theatres (Feist 1996, p.iv). Smaller casts also of course affected the artistic productions. Even performances of Shakespeare's plays by the flagship Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) faced significant reductions in cast numbers. As two examples out of many, the RSC performed 'As You Like It' in 1977 with a cast of 37, and in 1993 with 23; and while in 1963 they presented 'Hamlet' with a cast of 47, by 1988 it had fallen to 18 (Edgar 1993, p.455).[9] But also, and importantly, the scope of contemporary playwriting was curtailed through the imperative to save money by producing new plays with as few cast members as possible. As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, playwrights, directors, and literary managers have all raised the difficulty of writing and producing plays about major social issues when casts have to be restricted. The small scale can "narrow the writer's vision"[10] and, even when a writer wants to, make it hard for him or her to "attack the big problems on the scale you'd like".[11]

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[9] It is worth noting that this information has not always percolated through to other writings in the cultural field, perhaps because one of the classic papers on the economics of the arts, Baumol and Bowen (1976), predicates part of its argument on the assertion that it is "fairly difficult to reduce the number of actors necessary for a performance of *Henry IV*, Part II" (p.223). Clearly the more recent evidence casts doubt on the claim, but it crops up again in Bennett (1996, p.10, with *King Lear* as the example) and Quinn (1997, p.144, with *Hamlet*) – both authors stating that these plays require the same number of actors as they did when Shakespeare wrote them.

[10] Robert Hewison, 'Case of the disappearing playwrights', *Sunday Times*, 26th May 1985, p.41.

[11] Playwright Barry Keefe, quoted in Robert Hewison, 'Case of the disappearing playwrights', *Sunday Times*, 26th May 1985, p.41.

Closely linked to the financial restrictions imposed on artists and arts organisations, and part of the same ideological commitment towards commerce and the dominance of the market, was the pressure brought to bear on arts organisations to see themselves as businesses. Thus, performance targets, measurements, mission statements, business plans, (and the concomitant growth in administrative, financial and marketing departments) were introduced and spread. Bennett (1996) refers to the way in which marketing departments in arts organisations became, in the 1980s, "geared far more to [...] commercial imperatives" (p.11), and utilised methods prevalent in commercial and industrial companies.

The effect of this was to increase the number of management and administrative staff in theatres which at the same time were cutting artistic staff: theatre critic Lyn Gardner writes that "one of the problems with most regional theatres was that [...] years of crisis had seen the numbers of administrative and marketing staff increase, while less and less money was spent on production and performances".[12]

Again, such developments continued under the new Labour Government after its election in May 1997, with "managerial competence – before achievement, artistic understanding or intellectual standing – [being] prized" to such an extent that the retiring head of the Civil Service expected a reaction against the increasing number of people from business being appointed to cultural bodies.[13]

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[12] Lyn Gardner, 'You can't market rubbish. Well, you can – but the audience won't come back again', *Guardian*, 27th September 2000, G2 p.15.
[13] Martin Wroe and Richard Brooks, 'In culture's hallowed halls, it's raining businessmen', *Observer*, 18th January 1998.

Alongside and clearly associated with these developments was the emergence of the argument for the economic importance of the arts, which some have seen as a defensive attempt to protect the arts from both the economic and ideological assaults upon them. Studies such as John Myerscough's (1988) set out to show that the arts brought economic advantage to society, through providing jobs and export revenue, increasing tourism, and encouraging investment through cultural regeneration. Such arguments, however valid, were frequently perceived as reinforcing the defensiveness of the arts world in a market society.

In this context, it would be unsurprising if the concerns raised in the 1970s by practitioners and others concerned with cultural matters about the role of arts workers in policy-making, and particularly the question of representation in the arts funding system, might become of lesser importance than that of merely surviving (and complying with the new management and marketing requirements) in order to try and create some artistic work.

2.4.2 Shifting the Emphasis from Producers to Consumers

One of the issues which has run as a thread through British cultural policy is the relationship between artists and audiences. The state arts funding system has had the twin goals of promoting excellence and increasing accessibility of the arts, which in effect means both supporting artists and providing for audiences. Achievement of this duality, however, has not always been deemed possible. Roy Shaw, Secretary-General of the Arts Council from 1975 to 1983, while arguing for doing "both at once", referred to the difficulty expressed by his predecessor, W.E. Williams, in fulfilling both aims simultaneously (ACGB 1979a, p.7). Williams had decided to promote excellence above accessibility, to "raise" rather than "spread" (ibid.). Earlier still, in the debates during the transformation of

CEMA to the Arts Council, this tension had "been almost entirely resolved in favour of art and the professional artist" (Hewison 1995, p.34).

But the arguments continued, and in the 1980s the emphasis moved more clearly towards audiences – or rather, in the terminology introduced in the 1980s, to consumers and customers. Richard Luce, Arts Minister from 1985 to 1990, argued in a speech in 1987 that those involved in the arts "should make your first objective 'pleasing the customer' ", and that "the only real test of our ability to succeed is whether or not we can attract enough customers."[14] The Arts Council chairman at that time, Rees-Mogg, claimed that he was "always convinced that arts grants should primarily be a consumer and not a producer subsidy [...] Ought arts funding to be for the artists or for the audiences? When tax funds are concerned, I think the justification has to be one of access for audiences".[15]

This change in emphasis from artist to audience was part of a wider alteration taking place in society at that time, in which there was a "shift in power and authority from producer to consumer", meaning that "the capacity to determine the form, nature and quality of goods and services has moved from the former to the latter" (Abercrombie 1991, p.172). In this elevation of the role of consumers "no-one else has the right to make decisions in their place; no specially privileged social group may challenge their judgements" (Keat et al 1994, p.3) – including the producers of the goods and services that are being 'consumed'.

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[14] Richard Luce, speech to the Council of Regional Arts Associations, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 8th July 1987.
[15] William Rees-Mogg, 'Affording art for all', *The Times*, 15th July 1993, p.16.

There are a number of reasons for this shift. One is that changes in the class structure and greater social mobility occurred as a result of the need for more highly-qualified workers. The members of this new social sector, with a newly-found disposable income, became large consumers of both cultural and material goods (Volkerling 1996, p.200).

A second reason for the shift, as many commentators (e.g. Harvey, 1990) have observed, is that the development of post-Fordism, with its 'niche marketing', has increased the significance of consumption. With this development, which began to emerge in the 1970s, consumers are treated more discriminately than before and their purchasing choices given greater prominence. It is important to note, however, that the existence of post-Fordism does not mean that the Fordist producer-led model has been wiped out: instead the two forms tend to exist side-by-side. But undoubtedly consumer choice has become more pre-eminent as a result of this change.

Thirdly, changes in the nature and perception of citizenship have played a part in the shift away from producers. In the context of the move towards a market society, economic values have become dominant, with individuals being considered more as buyers in the market place than as citizens in a political sphere. An emphasis on exchange values rather than use values has affected all aspects of society and has transformed citizens into consumers, changing "the relationship between the providers of public services and those who receive them" (Gray 2000, pp.12-13).

Thus, at a time when arts producers were attempting to assert their claim to be part of the arts policy-making system, a significant change was taking place

which down-graded the role of the artist, in favour of audiences. Alongside the other developments outlined above, this change would contribute towards both an undermining of arts practitioners' attempts to become more involved in policy-making, and a reinforcing of the idea that artists had had too much power anyway. Nicholas Abercrombie (1991) illustrates his argument by way of the publishing industry, suggesting that aesthetic considerations – formerly the criteria on which publication was decided – have been superseded by concerns about selling the product, and about how it will appeal to its potential audience (pp.174-177). He goes on to suggest that as a result of the shift from producer to consumer, a corresponding change takes place within organisations, which involves a decrease in the influence of those people "directly concerned with production", and the concomitant increase in power of marketing and finance departments within companies (Abercrombie 1991, p.177). Edgar (1999) notes a similar development in the restructuring of the BBC, suggesting that a "fundamental aim was to shift power from the setter-uppers [the producers] to the putter-outers [BBC Broadcast], and thus to tame the creative pretensions of supposedly elitist producers on the public's behalf" (p.16).

We have already seen (above, 2.3.1), how the marketisation of the arts led to the greater influence of the administrative side within artistic organisations. This shift was not only confined to arts organisations themselves but to the arts funding system too: the producers of the arts lost out in influence over policy-making because of the increased emphasis in the system on the management and measurement of the arts. This is evident in the increase in the number of business people on the Arts Council's governing body, from 5% in 1946 to 26% in 1993 (Gray 2000, p.129). It is also reflected in the increased number of marketing and management staff working at the Arts Council, and the perception that, after

1979, "the artform departments were effectively demoted in the command structure" (Witts, p.442).

There were other developments, too, that had actually begun towards the end of the 1960s but whose impact was intensified or transformed in the 1980s and 1990s by the developments outlined above. One of these other aspects of the changed emphasis away from producers to consumers can be found in the elaboration of critical theories about audience interpretation and reception. These put forward the view that the artistic product is not the sole creation of the artist, but the result also, even instead, of responses and interpretations by audiences, viewers and readers (cf. Wolff 1993, pp.95-136, for an account of these approaches). In these theories of interpretation, some writers still argue for the artist/author's ascendancy in providing the meaning of the work of art. However, others propose a model in which equal status is given to all interpretations of the art work, of which the original creator's is only one – thus reducing the idea of the individual creator to "the level of an obsolete, romantic curiosity" (Duelund 1998, p.109). At the extreme of this argument, Roland Barthes (1977) declares the "death" of the author, arguing that a text does not have a "single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God)" (p.46); and that its multiple sources and meanings come together only in the reader of the work. Thus, "to give writing its future [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (p.148). Janet Wolff (1993), assessing these theories of cultural reception, comes down in favour of a sociological approach which "must include a theory of the artistic subject" (p.123), in which the artist "retains a central relevance" (p.136). Nevertheless, the general thrust of these approaches is to emphasise the significance of the audience/reader/viewer and diminish the role of the artist in the production of the art work.

In the theatre this theoretical approach was evident in the development of performance art, experimental theatre and multi-media performance, which deliberately attempted to question the boundaries between artist and audience; and – less directly – was reflected in the collectively devised, and 'verbatim', plays of many of the alternative and political theatre companies which emerged from the late 1960s.

Some of the experimental theatre companies and performance artists were closely influenced by these theories. The work of these artists was deliberately aimed at disrupting the centrality of a single text and a single author, presenting multiple and ambiguous meanings, and elevating in importance the contribution of the audience. Companies like the Wooster Group brought together extracts from plays with sounds, film, and images, in their productions; while The Performance Group "advocated a participatory theatre in which the transactions between audience and performer, and the relationship of performance to text, would be redrawn" (Kaye 1996, p.155). In his examination of the work of some experimental theatre practitioners from the late 1960s to mid-1980s, Nick Kaye writes: "[Richard] Foreman observes that 'structure is always a combination of the THING and the PERCEIVING of it', while [Michael] Kirby, similarly, does not understand either the work or its structures to exist in any way independently of a process of negotiation with the viewer" (Kaye 1994, p.48).

The work of the political theatre groups derived from an outlook which was anti-authoritarian, sometimes socialist, and usually committed to collective activity in opposition to individualism. It led frequently to productions which were devised by the whole theatre company together, and which drew on the experiences, and even the verbatim words, of communities with whom the companies were

working and who would then form the audiences for the productions. The resulting plays were thus the product of a combined contribution of artists and community.

While these developments in experimental and political theatre did not, for the most part, explicitly refer to the theoretical approaches to audience reception and interpretation, they clearly ran parallel to them in their displacement of the artistic worker as a central figure.

It is worth noting here that these changes had particular consequences of relevance for the subject of my case study. Playwrights were especially affected: displaced as the sole author by multi-media performance pieces, by collectively devised plays, and by verbatim theatre whose content was the words of people other than the writer. Alongside the positive features of such developments, the detrimental effects on the role of the individual writer caused some concern. Irving Wardle, writing in the Times in 1982, drew attention to the Royal Court Theatre's philosophy that 'the writer leads', which, he said, "no one has seriously disputed for the past 25 years", but which was now "waning" as a result of these changes.[16] The British playwright David Edgar was among those who raised questions about the impact of such developments, noting that the widespread practice of devising among small-scale theatre companies had led to a consequent reduction in the number of plays written directly by playwrights (1993, p.452). Edgar had been one of those involved in a sold-out session debating the issue, organised by the West Midlands branch of the Theatre Writers' Union at the Birmingham Readers and Writers Festival in 1991. Not all

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[16] Irving Wardle, 'The playwright as pathfinder', *The Times*, 8th December 1982.

playwrights took this viewpoint, including some members of the West Midlands TWU. Nevertheless, there was a strong thread of concern, which was still prevalent enough in 1998 for one of the Regional Arts Boards to refer to it in its policy statement on new writing; although it also rejected the idea that the existence of devised work should mean the demise of the playwright (South West Arts [1998], p.3).

Thus, a number of currents, both theoretical and practical, were contributing to a similar conclusion: that arts practitioners were not as central to the production of art works as they had previously been felt to be, and so no longer held a privileged position in it. Such a view would understandably reinforce the weak position that arts practitioners as a whole had in relation to being represented in cultural policy-making, as well as justifying the perception that those few artists who did hold influence were undeserving of the position. This is not to say that these different strands were always consciously connected by participants in the arts world, but that a number of important developments were all tending towards the same conclusions. Sometimes, though, these connections *were* made by practising artists: Graeme Rigby (a writer and performer himself), when interviewing theatre practitioners in the north for a report on playwriting in the region, noticed "a significant move away from viewing the playwright in the role of 'primary creator'", and went on: "Post-modernism has [...] arrived in the North and with it, an active suspicion towards the idea of the 'authority' vested in the written word" (Rigby [1995], p.5).

2.4.3 Undermining Professionalism and Trade Unionism

Another key aspect of the perception and understanding of arts practitioners in this period is related to their position as professionals. This is a complex issue,

with a number of facets relevant to practitioners' role in policy-making, including their own sense of identity as professionals, the perception of others as to their role and identity, the resources and back-up they have access to, and their ability to organise around their interests.

From the beginning of its existence the Arts Council's focus was on professional artists, rather than amateurs. In its report of its first decade the Council stated that "The achievement and preservation of standards in the arts is, primarily, [...] the role of the professional" (ACGB 1956, p.11). The role of amateurs was seen as being limited to 'diffusing' those arts produced by the professionals; and since the Council's Secretary-General, W.E. Williams, had already argued for a concentration on standards rather than diffusion (ACGB 1953), the priority was clearly for the professional in the field.

As a result, the emphasis of the arts funding system as a whole in the ensuing decades continued to be on professionals, with amateurs being recognised for funding only when they collaborated with professional artists (Hutchison and Feist 1991). Local authorities gave more attention to amateur arts, but the bulk of their spending still went towards professional organisations.[17]

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[17] Although the distinction between professionals and amateurs is commonly made, there is in practice often a blurring between the two. Ruth Towse (1993), writing about singers in Britain, refers to the "interaction" between professional and amateur singers, and remarks that "on occasion these groups overlap to the extent that it is not an easy task to clearly define the boundaries between them" (p.2). Hutchison and Feist (1991) broaden this observation to all artforms, describing amateur and professional arts as "intertwined and interdependent", on a "continuum or spectrum of ambition, accomplishment and activity", rather than with a clear division between the two.

The exact definition of what makes a professional artist is, however, somewhat complicated.[18] Ruth Towse (1996), surveying research on the economic position of artists, refers to studies in which a variety of criteria have been used in an attempt to define precisely what an artist is, and some of these are specifically germane to a conception of the artist as a professional. They are professional, arts-related, qualifications; earnings from work in the arts; and membership of a professional body or trade union.

Of particular relevance to the role of arts practitioners in policy-making, and to the arguments put forward for more representative involvement, is the issue of membership of professional bodies and trade unions. Although there are differences between trade unions and professional bodies (cf. for example, McGuigan 1981, p.36), both types of organisation have relevance for the argument here. Organisations like the Musicians' Union and the Theatre Writers' Union have operated as trade unions, negotiating pay and working conditions with employers. However, others, such as the Incorporated Society of Musicians, restrict membership along the lines of a professional body, admitting only those with professional training or with evidence of previous professional employment in the field. It is also possible for organisations to combine features of both categories, as do Equity and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain (although, as will be discussed further in later chapters, it was the distinction between the two categories that became significant at various times in the relations between the Theatre Writers' Union and the Writers' Guild).

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[18] This is partly as a consequence of the blurring between professional and amateur status, but also because of the precarious and multi-faceted nature of employment in the arts (with many artists engaged in several strands of employment at the same time, and not all of them in the arts).

In the debates for greater representation of practitioners in the Arts Council, artists' trade unions and professional associations fulfilled two roles: as bodies from which representatives might be elected in order to bring more democracy to the decision-making process, and as organisations which had the resources and status to pursue and promote an argument for greater practitioner involvement. Thus, the 1967/8 House of Commons Estimates Committee recommended that the Arts Council should work with "the bodies representative of artists" to investigate how artists could be "more fully and directly represented" in the Arts Council (pp.xv,lix); and organisations like the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Society of Authors were cited as examples of where representatives should be drawn from (e.g. Williams 1979, p.170). At the same time, artists' trade unions and professional bodies themselves contributed to the debates about participation in decision-making. Equity, for example, as we have seen, was one of the bodies arguing for greater representation in the Arts Council in evidence to the 1948/9 and 1967/68 House of Commons Estimates Committees, and also gave evidence to the Arts Council's working party on organisation (ACGB 1979b, p.83).

However, one aspect of the Conservative governments' monetarist programme of the 1980s and 1990s, which also affected the arts world, was their deliberate restraint of trade unions and the undermining of professional organisations. While the main focus of the Conservatives' attack on work organisation was the traditional, manufacturing trade unions, professional bodies were certainly not immune to criticism or change, and both approaches had an impact on workers in the arts. A wide range of practices in public services, particularly in education and health, were challenged by successive Conservative governments, and these included the way in which the workers involved were trained, how they

perceived themselves, and the ways in which they organised themselves professionally.

Such changes also affected arts practitioners' professional and trade union bodies. Organisations like Equity and the Musicians' Union for example, had for many years conducted a policy of a 'closed shop', maintaining a very tight entry to the profession through the rationing of the union's membership card, and negotiating minimum rates of pay and limitations on numbers of hours worked. But the closed shop was made illegal by the Conservative government in 1990, and the economic recession weakened the position of trade unions and professional bodies in defending their members' pay and conditions.

The prevailing atmosphere of hostility from government in the 1980s and 1990s towards trade union and professional organisation and ethos would thus have contributed to an undermining of professional identification among arts practitioners, and added to the perception that they were not entitled to argue for greater representation in policy-making, especially collectively.

2.5 Conclusion

It can be seen that the issue of the role of arts practitioners in policy-making has been a continuing thread in debates about cultural policy in Britain since the Second World War. While the emphasis in the Arts Council charter on high standards in professional arts tended to put arts organisations at the centre of concern, artists as a whole were not generally involved in the key decision-making, and indeed there was a general suspicion about the participation of

practitioners in both policy-making and implementation, particularly concerning the distribution of funds. The demands for greater involvement, which emerged in the 1970s, were largely resisted; and, under the impact of monetarism and as a result of shifts in both theoretical and practical perceptions of the role of the artist, arts workers found themselves operating in a radically different situation.

Clive Gray suggests that, other than "a brief phase in the mid-1970s", demands for involvement "have always been muted" (Gray 2000, p.111). But my case study research shows that, under the impact of the restrictions and demands of the political and economic changes of the 1980s and 1990s, at least in the theatre sector, there was instead a gradual change in focus by practitioners. Rather than concentrate on demands for direct representation *on* Arts Council bodies, artists worked to achieve change by negotiation *with* arts funders (and employers) through developing their own organisations. For although the developments of the 1980s and 1990s changed both the discourse and the material conditions of the environment in which arts workers were seeking to have influence, they certainly did not remove the need for that influence.

Firstly, the effects of funding cuts and the changed ideological climate continued the impetus among arts practitioners to make demands for improved conditions for their work; while, secondly, the campaigns of the 1970s had not resolved the difficulties they faced in making those demands heard. Thus, a seminar held by the National Campaign for the Arts (NCA) in 1994 on 'The Future for the Arts Council' resulted in proposals that suggest that the concerns of the 1970s were still very much alive. In its report of the seminar the NCA puts forward "four important areas for the Arts Council of England to address", including "a

commitment to openness and to genuine accountability, [... and] consultation with arts practitioners" (NCA 1994, p.1).

So although the developments of the 1980s and 1990s closed down some important openings for arts practitioners to become more involved in policy-making – particularly in relation to their representation on the Council, panels and committees of the arts funding system – they did not prevent them from seeking to affect policy, and of organising themselves to do so. The second part of this thesis looks specifically at what happened in the area of new writing for the theatre, particularly with the development of playwrights' organisations and their attempts to influence the policies of both the arts funding system and the practices of theatre managements. But first, the next chapter considers why these issues are significant, and why it matters whether practitioners take part in making policy about the arts.

Chapter 3

A Framework for Participation

The aim of this chapter is to develop a theoretical understanding of the issues surrounding the question of practitioners' involvement in policy-making; and thus to explore the question of why practitioner participation is, or should be, of any interest and significance in cultural policy.

The chapter approaches this from two angles, considering *how* practitioners are (and could be) involved – i.e. the processes of involvement; and *why* they are (or should be) involved in policy-making – the principles of involvement. The discussion of *how* they contribute to policy-making focuses on a range of ideas about democratisation, particularly arguments about representative and participatory forms of democracy, and on the notion of governance; while the question of *why* they might be involved considers theories of civil society and some issues of power. Clearly, the practicalities and principles of participation are closely intertwined. The distinction here is being made to allow for a detailed and focused exploration of both aspects.The following discussion encompasses both a general consideration of these issues and concepts, and their applicability to cultural policy.

Before going further it is important to acknowledge and clarify a point about the outcome of the policy-making process. It may be assumed that the purpose of questioning the ways that policy is made is to ensure that decisions are more robust and their implementation improved. This is indeed one of the aspirations in literature examining democratisation in a range of policy areas (Burton and

Duncan 1996, Gaster 1996) as well as in discussion on democracy more generally. It is also cited as one of the objectives of consultation in government documents (e.g. Audit Commission, [1999]). However, Paul Burton and Sue Duncan warn that such aspirations may be founded on an untested assumption about links between innovations in democratic participation and the resulting policies (pp.12-13). Indeed, the Audit Commission points out that almost seventy-five per cent of surveyed local authorities "failed to link the results of consultation with decision-making processes" (1999, p.8).

Interestingly, much of the literature on democracy and democratisation focuses on the *principles* of involvement rather than on its effect on policy. David Miller argues explicitly that attention to the quality of democracy in the decision-making process is at least as significant as the quality of the decisions themselves (Miller 1993, p.90). And David Wilson is of the opinion that changes of procedure, in which there is wider involvement in decision-making, do not in fact alter outputs: "it is rather a matter of a difference in processes" (Wilson 1998, p.91). He goes on: "The crucial point is that opportunities for participation, one of the fundamental values of [...] democracy, should exist" (p.109).

One of the reasons for this emphasis is that – as discussed further below – there has been widespread concern about shortcomings in a range of democratic processes; and these weaknesses and obstacles have served to influence the terms of the debate so that attention has been especially focused on the principles and practices of participation. The purpose of my thesis is not to set out to prove or disprove a hypothesis about links between participation and quality of output and outcome in cultural policy; but rather to examine what the role of practitioners in cultural policy-making is, how that role is actually perceived, what the issues and

problems surrounding their involvement are, and what is the rationale for that involvement. The quality of decision and effectiveness of implementation is part of that examination, but it is not the main impetus for it.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that one of the reasons behind the demands for better practitioner representation in the arts funding system was the perception that poor policy was being produced without it. That this might well have been the case is borne out by the observation by one of the chairmen of the Arts Council, Rees-Mogg:

> "I never thought [...] that we actually had the proficiency to make very discriminating artistic judgements [...] the senior people on the Council had to be generalists. They were dealing with some arts of which they had no full understanding. My discernment of ballet was so negligible that provided the people didn't actually fall off the stage I didn't know whether they were doing it properly or not" (Witts 1998, p.417).

In a similar vein, Charles Landstone, a drama director at the Arts Council, gave the opinion that "from the moment that the power of the Drama Panel was reduced by Lord Keynes in 1945, each successive Drama Director has had to struggle with a Council of which only a minority had any understanding of theatre problems" (Hutchison 1982, p.63).

An alternative view was put forward by Hugh Jenkins M.P. when he was a member of the Arts Council (he later became a Minister for the Arts in a Labour Government). In a House of Commons debate in 1970 he argued that many of the criticisms made against the Council "arise not from the Council and the panels being very often wrong [...] but because they are right or thought to be right in a remote and superior sort of way [...] and we poor devils out in the sticks have no

say" (Jenkins 1979, p.73). This view, then, echoes the point made above that to a great extent it is the process employed in the formation of policy that matters, and therefore if there are shortcomings in that process they should be improved even when the policy itself is considered to be satisfactory.

Nonetheless, the effect of wider participation on the quality and effectiveness of the resulting policies needs to be considered: further discussion of the impact of practitioner involvement is taken up in Parts II and III of the thesis. This chapter, meanwhile, is concerned with the procedures and principles of that involvement in the policy-making process.

3.1 Processes of Involvement

It is frequently acknowledged (Stewart et al 1994, Wheeler 1996, Barber 1998, Roniger 1998) that the spur to questioning the processes of policy-making is a recognition that the current systems of democracy are failing in some way.[1] In the cultural field, as we have seen in the previous chapter, arts practitioners – ever since the introduction of state subsidy in 1945, and particularly from the late 1960s – have been critical of the scope for, and structures of, participation in policy-making.

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[1] Although it is often referred to simply as 'voter apathy', the disengagement of people from democratic activity and the shortcomings of democratic structures and practices are in reality more complex. The failures noted in recent years include not only declines in voting participation in elections, but also the distance felt by citizens from their governing bodies, whether at local, national or European level (European Commission, 2001); the inability of publicly funded programmes to provide services adequately and to achieve social inclusion (and particularly the alienation and disempowerment felt by users of such services) (Alcock et al, 1996); and deficiencies in the conduct and functioning of public bodies and semi-public quangos (Burton and Duncan, 1996).

Coinciding with these perceptions and experiences of disengagement, the political, social and economic changes of the 1980s (cf. Chapter 2) have led to an increased emphasis by government on the consumer (Barnes et al, 1996) and therefore on partnership in service provision (wherein a range of private and semi-public bodies provide social services in a variety of joint arrangements with local or national government). These democratic concerns are thus also situated within a wider discussion about 'governance', by which is meant an alteration in the structure of government whereby other agencies are involved in formulating policy, as well as delivering services, alongside elected governments. Such agencies are likely to include voluntary and community-based groups, professional and labour organisations, self-help groups, non-statutory providers of services, and commercial organisations. A particular feature of their involvement is that they operate as networks of organisations, along with government bodies – "tied together by policy and resource dependencies upon each other" (Gray 2000, p.169). H. K. Colebatch describes it as a process in which negotiation takes place among the participants "to knit together agreed courses of action" (Colebatch 2002, p.78).

The term 'governance' has become increasingly prevalent during the 1990s, and has been applied to all levels of government from local to international. It has been interpreted slightly differently by various commentators (Adshead and Quinn 1998, pp.210-211); and although of course the word is not new itself, it has been given a new "distinctive"[2] use which is generally regarded as indicating a significant shift in government organisation and ideology.

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[2] [Editors],'Welcome to *Local Governance*', Local Governance Vol.24, No.1, 1998, p.1.

These changes and criticisms have led to a range of proposals and experiments in new forms of democracy, and to discussions and comparisons of these and the more established methods. Indeed, it has been noted that "a remarkable feature of recent decades has been [...] the pace of democratization and the way it has affected even the established as well as the aspirant democracies" (Campbell and Burnell 1994, p.vi). Where they have already been tried out, these methods have been undertaken and advocated by non-statutory organisations as well as by government bodies (Stewart et al 1994, Barber 1998). The alternatives put forward include both those which attempt to modify and extend existing approaches, and those which are aimed more at complementing existing methods with radically different ones, such as citizens' juries and deliberative debates. The latter are described by Miller as an approach "whereby initial preferences are transformed to take account of the views of others" and in which emphasis is placed on "a person's capacity to be swayed by rational arguments and to lay aside particular interests and opinions in deference to overall fairness and the common interest" (1993, pp.75-76)). It is a view of democracy "as a mechanism that changes preferences through public discussions" (Habermas 1996, p.337).

Although some of these proposals for improving democratic and decision-making processes are primarily focused on enhancing individual citizenship, it should be clear that many of them require or encourage the involvement of organisations and individuals with professional expertise, including providers of services, professional bodies, and self-help groups. Taken together they offer a context in which questions of practitioner involvement in cultural policy-making can be considered, as well as opportunities for that involvement to take place. Some of the consultations undertaken in the cultural field, which are discussed in more detail in Part II, have provided such opportunities for wider participation.

Mostly, these fall in the category of extending existing methods; for example, by adding a stage of consultation into a decision-making process. Occasionally attempts have been made to introduce a new approach, such as the National Arts and Media Strategy debate of the early 1990s, which aimed to stimulate discussion on a major scale across a range of cultural policy issues.

The relevance to cultural policy of these points about democratisation can also be traced in the debates around participation outlined in the previous chapter, where arts practitioners have been critical of the way the funding system was organised and how policy was made; and, as a result, put forward proposals for changes in the system. These included calls for wider membership of policy-making bodies, more transparency in decision-making processes, and the establishment of new policy-making forums. Arts practitioners, as will be seen in Part II, have participated in the consultation structures set up by the arts funding system, as well as initiating their own debates and activities in order to influence policy-making. There have also been instances where, through their professional associations and self-help groups, and in their arts institutions, they have been involved in the kind of networks of which governance is constructed.

3.1.1 Issues in the Processes of Involvement

Several important issues are thrown up by these developments in democracy and government, and they have led to discussion of the limitations and problems of specific measures and, more broadly, to debates about the advantages and disadvantages of participatory and representative forms of democracy. It is important to say here that, although the distinction is often made between these different forms of democracy, at the same time there is a recognition that there is a sharper distinction to be made between democracy of any kind and anti-

democratic forms of government (Budge, 1993). Further, some of the proposed innovations which are categorised by some as participatory democracy are seen by others not so much as alternatives to, but as ways of complementing and extending, representative democracy (Stewart et al, 1994).

Another response to the shortcomings of representative democracy is to suggest the use of direct democracy, in which everyone has a vote.[3] While some observers would include direct democracy within the 'umbrella' of participatory democracy, Barbara Jeffrey argues for a distinction between the two, describing the latter as "hover[ing] somewhere between" representative and direct democratic forms (Jeffrey 1997, p.25). Because direct democracy remains largely at the level of ideas and aspirations, this chapter concerns itself primarily with the concepts and practice of representative and participatory democracies.

There are several problems and issues that emerge from these proposals and discussions of government and democracy. These are discussed broadly in the following sections, and more specifically through the case study in Part II. They concern matters of information and knowledge; selection and representation; resources, recognition and influence; consultation and agreement; and special interests and the 'common good'.

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[3] Direct democracy has only rarely been practised since its most developed – but nevertheless circumscribed – appearance in ancient Athens. But the convergence in the 1990s of new technology in communications with the increased interest in different forms of democracy, has led some commentators to suggest that direct participation, even in the complexity and large scale of the modern world, has become more possible (Budge 1993, Barber 1998). They propose, for example, that debates could be held through the internet and live meetings linked up electronically. As yet, such innovations are still largely theoretical, although some experiments have been undertaken, mainly in the United States.

a) Information and Knowledge

One of the arguments *against* wider participation in policy-making is that it might involve people who are not experts in the field and who will therefore have difficulty in understanding and in making informed decisions, leading to poorly made policy. The view that experts are required finds its reflection in cultural policy. For example, the emphasis on leading names in the arts world for membership of the Arts Council that was noted in Chapter 2, and the selection of senior staff of established arts organisations for arts inquiries, can be seen partly in this light. There is a connection here with the notion of 'resource rich' organisations, which was discussed in Chapter 1, where the possession of expertise and information is among the attributes that make those organisations influential in policy-making.

The argument for sufficient knowledge and information can be answered in a number of ways. Firstly, there is no evidence that those chosen to sit on policy-making bodies are necessarily always more informed than their un-selected colleagues, and might in some instances be less so. It is clear, for example, from the quotes given earlier in this chapter that, far from being experts in their field, members of the Arts Council were considered by both a chairman and one of their officers, to be generally lacking in the required expertise. In the 1960s and 1970s, as indicated in Chapter 2 above, some of those sitting on the Arts Council and its panels also knew little about significant new developments in their artform. Similarly, during the Arts Council's Theatre Review in 2000, practitioners in small-scale touring companies and from arts centres were concerned that the inquiry working group was not sufficiently aware of the realities of working in these parts of the theatre sector.

Secondly, the argument for prior expertise is also countered by writers drawing on evidence from developments such as citizens' juries and deliberative debates. Some of these experiments have shown that where lay people have sufficient access to information and arguments, they increase their knowledge and understanding to a point in which they are competent to make a considered judgement about the matter before them (Budge 1993, Stewart et al 1994). This is also one of the findings of Frey and Pommerehne's study of Swiss referenda on arts issues, in which voting was preceded by (sometimes very intensive) discussion (Frey and Pommerehne 1995, p.63).

Wider participation in cultural policy-making need not, therefore, be ruled out simply from a perceived lack of information and experience. What is required is firstly a broader and more open approach towards potential participants by those with responsibility for public policy, so that unfounded or untested assumptions are not made about their knowledge and understanding. Secondly, mechanisms could be employed by which participants can be provided with sufficient information to tackle complex issues along the lines of the 'hearings' and deliberations of citizens' juries. Both these measures could help to widen the range of individuals and organisations drawn into the policy process, and should also lead to richer discussions and better informed decisions.

b) Selection and Representation

A key question in debates about democratic structures and processes is that of representation. Criticisms of representative forms of democracy are based on the distance that is said to be created between electors and their representatives, and the passivity that it engenders in the majority. One response to this perceived shortcoming is the creation of new forums, or the introduction or extension of

consultations. But the problem with these solutions is that the mechanisms for eliciting participation are either the selection of participants (by those seeking their views) or self-selection (by the participants themselves). Neither are satisfactory, and neither really answer the criticism that there is a gap between those participating and the communities or interests of which they are a part.

In the case of selection, exclusion is still often practised, because not all those concerned with a particular issue or field of interest may be given the opportunity to be involved in the participation process. My research in playwriting policy has found that theatre practitioners informed about new forums, debates or consultations taking place in the cultural field are inevitably limited in number or scope by the knowledge of the officer drawing up the list, or by a circumscription such as invitations being extended only to grant recipients. Moreover, those invited to participate in more significant capacities (for example as speakers at a forum, or sitting on a working group) tend to be organisations and individuals that are 'resource rich', or could be categorised as insider groups with 'privileged access'. As will be illustrated in later chapters, arts practitioners have expressed concern at the narrow range of people chosen to sit on inquiries and working groups, and at the way they perceive the views of some arts organisations – usually the larger, more high profile ones – as being more influential than others in consultations.

In any arrangement where some participants are held to be representative of others, the question arises as to whether such representation is meaningful. Jeffrey (1997) cites the example of situations where one person is expected to speak for a number of community groups, who may or may not be in close contact with each other. There have been similar occurrences in the cultural

policy field: one or two theatre directors, for example, being expected to represent subsidised theatres 'in general' in a formal theatre inquiry committee. In this capacity they may be expected to be speaking for parts of the theatre sector with which they have very little contact (many repertory theatres, for instance, do not have close relations with small touring companies).

This difficulty of representation does not go unrecognised by those seeking the views of arts practitioners. One of the local authority arts officers interviewed for this research was quite clear that within the networks of theatre organisations he dealt with, even though the groups worked well together, "there's a massive variation of opinion and differences about how they should go about things and what they should say. So [...] depending on who you talk to, you might get a different response".[4] Nonetheless, he went on to say that while obtaining a "collective response" might be difficult, "you have to try".[5]

Self-selection among participants operates both in the more conventional consultations and in some of the new structures introduced in recent years, where, for example, local authorities set up open meetings to discuss specific issues. In Birmingham, for instance, such meetings have been arranged to consider priorities for the Council's annual budget. In these instances, invitations were extended to any interested groups and individuals. The authorities might have heard a wider range of views than they would otherwise, but in fact those views are little more than the expression of those attending the meetings. They cannot be held to be representative of any wider constituency, though they may be presented as such. Extensions of democracy such as these need to be regarded

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[4] Interview by the author, May 1999.
[5] Ibid.

carefully, and not credited with more authority or effectiveness than they justify. For instance, concern was expressed by the Regional Arts Board, and by some arts organisations in Birmingham, that culture would not feature highly at the City's open budget meetings unless it was raised by arts practitioners themselves. The fact that without the attendance of arts workers this item could have been omitted from proper consideration indicates the problem involved in this sort of open, but unrepresentative, consultation.

Another point of concern about representation relates to circumstances in which the consulted organisations are themselves not sufficiently representative of their community. This issue takes on particular dimensions when it is focused around points of social discrimination such as class, gender, and race. The Theatre Writers' Union, for instance, debated internally at various times in its history about whether it was dominated by white middle-class males, and whether it could represent fully, or meet the needs and experiences of, those writers who did not fall into this mould.

A further issue concerns whether the person delegated to represent his or her organisation on another body or at an event is properly able to speak for the organisation's members. Jeffrey refers to representatives who may be unwilling or unable to consult with their own members, and therefore end up by presenting only their own individual views on any committee or working party on which they sit. The 'unwilling' are those she describes as "not [...] keen to share information and therefore power" while the 'unable' are affected by circumstances such as lack of time for consulting with other members (1997, p.28).

These issues require much more consideration by arts funders, practitioners, and cultural policy researchers, if more democratic ways of reaching decisions are to be developed.

c) Resources, Recognition and Influence

Chapter 1 considered the importance of resources and recognition in the influence which individuals and organisations might have on policy deliberation. Within the context of the discussion in this chapter on democratic forms, the perceived status of an arts organisation is likely to be relevant in most of the structures being considered, where selection or self-selection are applied. Thus, in consultation processes the views of those who are 'resource-rich' may have more influence; while such organisations and individuals are also more likely to be invited to participate in working groups and advisory panels, and to contribute to policy debates. As will be seen in more detail in Part II, the perception of this influence by those not so favoured can lead not only to resentment amongst practitioners, but also to their alienation from consultative procedures. It is therefore important for the established policy-makers to take steps to ensure that their consultations are genuinely accessible to all those concerned with the issues under discussion. At the same time, as already suggested in Chapter 1, arts practitioners themselves can work to increase their profile and their relations with funders and local government.

d) Consultation and Agreement

Chapter 1 referred to the distinction between access and influence made by William A. Maloney and his fellow authors. The difference that they pinpoint is related to the resources of the groups involved, with those who are 'resource-rich' having sufficient influence to be involved in bargaining that is more likely

to have an impact on policy. The difference between access and influence also relates to another key issue raised by commentators, which is the stage at which participation takes place, and therefore whether participants are able to contribute not only to the deliberation process but also to the actual decision-making. This is partly linked to whether participation is an after-thought to the policy-making process or is more integrally bound into it. Jeffrey (1997) suggests that the 'bolting on' of participation leads to lack of real influence, with the real decisions being made outside the meetings in which the participants are involved – either in "preceding horse-trading" (p.27) or, as I found in my research on theatre writing policy, at various stages after the consultation.

Even where participation is written into the process it does not necessarily lead to decision-making powers. The DCMS guidance on local cultural strategies (2000) insists that consultation should be an integral part of the procedure for developing such strategies, to the extent of being required at two of the seven stages of development. The final decisions, however, still rest with local government. It can be argued that this should not be a problem when the bodies making the policy decisions are elected, as local councillors are. Provided that participation in such consultations is fairly and effectively organised, the final policy decisions *should* be the responsibility ultimately of those who have been elected to office. The sympathy expressed by Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn towards the top-down approach, noted earlier in Chapter 1, is precisely "on the grounds that 'those seeking to put policy into effect' are usually elected" (Hogwood and Gunn 1984, p.207). However, local government cultural policy is generally prepared by officers, not elected members; and councillors themselves are often far less knowledgeable about the arts than their officers. So while in theory the effectiveness of consultation is not diluted by the final decision being

in the hands of elected councillors, in practice those consulted might have less confidence in the decision-makers and therefore still feel that they have only access, and not influence.

This is also likely to be the case when the decision-making body is a selected one, such as the arts funding quangos. In a system where the governing members are appointed, especially on a basis that is considered doubtful by observers and participants, the criticism that views gathered at the consultation stage lack influence may become more vocal. It is beholden on the policy-making bodies in these circumstances to give full consideration to the views they have solicited in their consultations, and to make clear the ways in which they have done so and the reasons for either taking up or rejecting suggestions.

My research into playwriting policy has found many instances where practitioners felt that their ideas – carefully considered and contributed to the consultative debates – had just been ignored in the final report or policy document. There is more likelihood then that demands will be made for practitioners to have a say in the decision-making stage of the process. Whether this should be made possible relates to the question considered next.

e) Special Interests and the 'Common Good'

One of the issues that persistently emerges in considerations of different forms of democracy, and which is closely connected to the questions of representation discussed in (b) above, is that of whose interests are being presented and defended in a particular debate or structure, and how sectional interests relate to any notion of a 'common good'. While the earlier section (b) was focused on the

mechanisms of representation, my concern here is with a wider philosophical point.

The concept of the common or public good is one that recurs in many writings on democracy – it is the idea that some things are of benefit to society as a whole. In a democracy it is expected that the decision as to what constitutes the common good in any field will be made through the democratic process; i.e. it is "what the people, freely organized, will choose, not what some expert or prophet decrees" (Beetham 1993, p.57). At the same time though, the common good can be seen as being hostile to the narrower interests of specific groups when these cannot be met by, or come into conflict with, the wider interest.

This conflict between special interests and the wider good is present in all public policy issues, and thus evident in the field of cultural policy. Matters that are of concern to particular arts practitioners have to be set against, or at least seen in the context of, a broader understanding of society's cultural needs. (That these social needs are contested is of course part of the complicating condition in which these debates take place. As will be discussed further below, the common good is never static or finally resolved.) The conflict of interests is apparent for instance in the grant-making decisions of the arts funding system, where the needs of specific artists and arts organisations are balanced against the overall strategy of the funding bodies. (Although, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it could justifiably be argued that bodies such as the Arts Council are themselves representative of only a narrow constituency.)

Tensions between the wider interest and sectional concerns have also appeared in the debates on the involvement of arts practitioners in the policy process. For

example, during the discussions of the 1970s in Britain the criticisms were focused on the fact that the arts funding system did not operate in a representative way; and some of the artists' organisations therefore argued for a system that *was* based on representatives. The resistance of the arts funders to this view was based on a concern that such representatives would operate as delegates, expressing only those views which had been mandated by their organisations and in any case would present a narrow sectional interest rather than consider the weight of all arguments and concerns dealt with by the committee on which they sat. Discussing proposals for democratisation of the Arts Council, Robert Hutchison wonders if it would be "possible for an Arts Council member both to satisfactorily serve and represent, say the Drama Panel, and be responsible to 'the wider public'?" (Hutchison 1982, p.38). This specific question was in fact answered, though not necessarily resolved, by Richard Hoggart, who described his position as Drama Panel Chairman as "a double role. One was that I had to represent the drama department's needs to Council [...] The other was that you had to have an overall view and be aware of budgetary limits" (Witts, p.419).

The point about 'budgetary limits' is an important one in this context. Jeffrey's research on community participation in local government services found that representation of wider interests "broke down when groups were in competition for grants" (1997, pp.26-27). And since much of the work of the Arts Council's panels involved decisions about grants to artists and arts organisations, it is easy to see why commentators have been critical of a system in which arts practitioners were making decisions about their fellow arts workers. As practitioners were serving on the panels and committees in an individual capacity, critics could (and did) accuse them of favouritism towards friends or

hostility towards personal enemies. It could therefore be argued that a properly representative system would be less likely to put its committee members in such an invidious position.

This issue might also be resolved, at least to some extent, through some of the alternative approaches discussed earlier in this chapter. The question is embedded in, and answered in one way through, the idea of deliberative debates, including innovations such as citizens' juries, where lay people are specifically encouraged to consider policy matters on behalf of a wider community (Stewart et al 1994, Wilson 1998). Using this model, arts practitioners could be provided with a structure that would maximise their commitment to wider interests and limit their responses to their own needs.

The question also informs other developments which have taken place in the cultural field, such as the re-organisation of arts funding bodies away from artform concerns. Michael Volkerling argues that the traditional arts council structure based on artform panels produced "standing lobbies for the discipline they represent" (1982, p.82). In contrast, the New Zealand Council's re-structuring into four committees which deal with projects, individuals, institutions, and regional development resulted, he says, in deliberations "in a multi-disciplinary context" whereby "wider perspectives are therefore forced upon the consideration of any single issue" (p.84). On the other hand, Jo Caust, examining similar re-organisations to arts bodies in Australia and the United States, counters that in these cases the outcome has been that "in-depth knowledge of art practice [has] disappeared" and arts practitioners "no longer know where they belong or who to talk to", leaving many of them "disenfranchised" (Caust 2003, p.57).

In contrast to these views that sectional interests need to be either transcended or limited, David Beetham defends the idea of "interest-maximisation" as a key feature of democracy, arguing that democracy "must contain the implicit assumption that people are the best judges of their own interests" (Beetham 1993, p.61). A different way of looking at this question is the point made by Rose Wheeler (1996), drawing on work by Vivien Lowndes, that the notions of individual rights and community interests are actually both aspects of citizenship. Chris Bilton refers to "a collective public interest which is continually being renegotiated according to different interactions between groups and individuals" (Bilton 1997, p.248). Similarly, Benjamin R. Barber argues that civil groups should not be written off by "cynics" as "hypocritical special interests", suggesting that their views have a "political legitimacy" (Barber 1998, p.67). Thus, the argument is that special interests are a key part of social organisation, and at the same time can contribute to, rather than detract from, the collective voice. In this light the 'common good' is not static, but is the continually-changing result of negotiations and interchanges with a variety of interests and concerns.

This discussion is especially pertinent to the view of cultural practitioners' interests referred to in Chapter 1. It goes some way to answering the notion that artists are only ever concerned with their own needs; but more importantly it helps to provide a framework through which practitioners' role in policy-making can be viewed – as both having legitimate concerns which have a place in policy formation, but also as being capable of making contributions which go beyond their own particular interests, shaping and adding to the common good.

3.2 Principles of Involvement

Just as concern over current failures in democratic systems in the West has acted as the impetus for reconsidering the *practicalities* of policy-making, so the same concern has caused a re-examination of the *principles* underlying those processes and of previous analyses of the structure and organisation of society (Held 1993, p.1; Barber 1998, p.9). The aim of this questioning has been to provide insight into both the problems and their solution.

Such rethinking has also been stimulated by developments in Eastern Europe, although at first glance it might seem that the failures of the socialist system actually provided a vindication of the Western democratic method. Indeed, after the unravelling of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 there was a widespread view that this represented a 'triumph' for liberal democracy (noted in Held 1993, pp.4-5, 13; Parekh 1993, p.156; John Gray 1995,[6] 1999). Therefore, the idea that there might be another way (or other ways) of constructing democracy was ruled out of consideration by the supporters of this view.

However, notwithstanding the collapse of the (hitherto) main alternative, not all observers accepted the idea of an inevitable or total victory for liberal democracy as it was then constituted. Of the several forms of response, the one which seems to provide a particularly useful approach for the questions being considered in this thesis, is that which seeks to build an approach around the concept of 'civil society'.

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[6] John Gray, 'Cold sun rises at the end of the cold war', *Guardian*, 20th January 1995.

The rest of this section considers the idea of civil society, and the chapter concludes by exploring how it can throw light on practitioners' involvement in cultural policy-making.

3.2.1 The Concept of Civil Society

The term 'civil society' has a long history in political philosophy, in which it has been given different meanings and emphases at different times and from varying political and philosophical perspectives.

In Jeffrey C. Alexander's historical account (1998), the term has gone through three phases in modern society. Firstly – from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries – it was used in "an inclusive, umbrella-like" way, covering all organisations outside the state, and "definitely" also the market (Alexander 1998, p.3). In its second period, it was seen as referring solely to the market, with writers such as Hegel and Marx (in his early writings) conceiving it as the economic sphere (Simon 1991, p.71). In recent years – Alexander's third phase – the term has evoked particular interest as a sphere which is distinguished from both state and market. Alexander himself also distinguishes it from other "non-civil spheres", by which he means religion, race, and the patriarchal family (1998, p.11). In this third phase the concept has been increasingly referred to as a way of understanding the organisation and structure of social and power relations, and of considering issues of democracy. But in this contemporary usage there are also different meanings attributed to the term, informed by differing political and philosophical standpoints. It is therefore important to pay attention to this variation in interpretation, and to be clear about the way in which one wishes to use the concept.

Barber (1998) provides three contemporary definitions of civil society: as the private market, which operates independently from government; as communitarianism; and as a public sphere 'between' market and government. Organisations and individuals identified with each of these have claimed the term for their own outlook and approach.

Elaborating on the first of these definitions, Barber points to the oppositional stance taken by proponents of free markets towards government – a position intensified in the neo-liberalism of the 1980s. They see civil society as representing the private interests of those involved in the market, whose free operations are threatened by the interference of government and the social measures that governments introduce.

Communitarianism is the second contemporary interpretation of civil society identified by Barber. It focuses on ascriptive bonds, or "strong ties" (Gibson 1998, p.6), such as race, religion, and clan, rather than on voluntary relations; and is a response to what its supporters perceive as a damaging rise in individualism in society. The weakness of this outlook is that it can be both nostalgic and utopian (McGuigan 1996, p. 167); and its danger is that by focusing on the ties of community it inevitably places some people outside any given community, with the result that those 'outsiders' may be seen negatively, even with hostility. This is similar to the "mentality of the long siege", the problematic defensiveness that Williams recognises in his analysis of solidarity (Williams [1958] 1971, p.318); and it can prevent interaction with those who are not part of the community, thus weakening society and creating "social atomization" (Gibson 1998, p.6). The appeal to community – particularly a religious or racial one – can also submerge

not only other identities or moralities, but also the state itself, taking over "all public space" (Barber 1998, p.26).

Barber does also acknowledge the existence of a "more democratic form of communitarianism" (p.25), which in Britain is put forward by the UK Communitarian Forum. The aim of this grouping is the building of 'democratic communities', in which groups of citizens take part in open discussion about the issues they face, and work co-operatively and for the common good, taking action at a local level (Tam, 1996). But Barber argues that democratic and social pluralism is not automatic even in this conception of civil society.

Barber's third definition – the one that he himself subscribes to – is that of "strong democracy". It posits civil society as a third sphere, between government and the market, in which citizenship plays a key role, and which draws from characteristics of both the public and the private sectors. In this conception it emphasises civic engagement, pluralistic organisation, co-operative activity, open debate and decision-making; and it allows for differences of opinion and identity. This very much echoes Williams's proposals for overcoming the defensive limits of solidarity: converting this negative aspect "into the wider and more positive practice of neighbourhood", "achieving diversity without creating separation", and making room for, not only variation, but even dissidence, within the common loyalty" ([1958] 1971, p.319).

Clearly, inter-connections amongst people and organisations are an important feature of this expression of civil society, but they are not the close bonds of the communitarian outlook. Rather they consist of what James Gibson terms "weak ties" and "permeable social networks", which are open to new ideas and facilitate

a high level of social and democratic engagement (Gibson 1998, pp.6-7,14). In this model, association takes place "around common activity rather than common history"; it is an association that is both voluntary and inclusive (Barber, pp.50,52). Importantly, civil society in this form is seen as an extension and enhancement of government, not as a replacement for it; though it serves also to limit both excessive government and an over-dominant business sector.

Barber's views on civil society and civic activity have been echoed in the writings and activities of a number of commentators, organisations and forums in recent years. There are several reasons for this increased focus on the conception of civil society. Firstly, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, there has been growing concern that current democratic structures in the West have considerable shortcomings, which has led people to seek alternative ways of conceptualising society, and thereby to effect changes in its governance.

Secondly, analyses of events in Eastern Europe, especially in the years immediately prior to, and following, the revolutions of 1989, drew attention to the attenuated civil society of most of those countries and the serious problems this caused. The failure of the rulers of these nations, before 1989, to maintain the consent of their populations for their rule, and their suppression of an active civil society, led to their defeat; while since then – despite the "nascent civil societies" that helped to bring about those defeats (Gibson 1998, p.3) – a lack of the voluntary organisations, networks, and relationships that make up the civil sphere has hampered those countries' development. Even where large numbers of voluntary associations did spring up, as in Poland, the concomitant and essential values and practices of trust, openness, co-operation, and pluralistic discourse were seriously underdeveloped (Sztompka, 1998).

Thirdly, considered theoretically, it has been suggested that a conception of society divided into only government and economy is severely limited (Centre for Civil Society, 2002). Thus another dimension of the growing interest in the idea of civil society has been in the theoretical field, and in particular with the 'discovery' of the work of the early-twentieth century Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci is now regarded as a most significant analyst of the complexity of advanced industrial societies, whose structure cannot be reduced to the spheres of economy and government alone. Although some of his writings were translated into English earlier, the major part of his work, the 'Prison Notebooks', was not published in England until the 1970s, and some of the subsequent important debates around his ideas in France as well as in Italy were not translated into English until 1979 and 1980 (Jessop, 1980). Gramsci's work quickly struck a chord with some sections of the left in Britain, who were searching for new approaches to analysing society, and thereby to bringing about change; and has been drawn on by writers in cultural studies, sociology, and other disciplines concerned with the organisation of society and the role of culture in it. In the last thirty years his ideas have informed much of the thinking around culture and ideology, and their connection to power and democracy.

'Civil society' is one of the key terms in Gramsci's writings – the explanation of which Stuart Hall calls one of his "fundamental historical theses" (Hall 1996, p.426). In his work the focus is both on understanding how society is organised and structured, and on how revolutionary change may be undertaken and accomplished. He therefore uses the term not only descriptively, as a way of understanding existing social formations and relations, but also prescriptively,

pointing towards a future society in which "the active and productive public life [...] would and should continue to flourish" (Adamson 1980, p.222). He thus develops it as a concept that can be used analytically and applied more widely than the particular moment he is examining.

Although Gramsci argues for an historicist approach, basing his analyses in careful consideration of historical circumstances, this process of conceptualisation that he engages in means that his writings "go beyond a particular and local reference" (Mercer 1980, p.117), and are therefore widely regarded as having application to situations and societies other than those about which he is writing. Some commentators have argued that Gramsci's roots in his own time and place lessen his applicability elsewhere, but his insistence on the importance of basing analysis on the particular historical circumstances – his 'functional' approach (Adamson 1980, p.219) – actually leads to an openness in application. This is because, rather than supplying ready-made over-arching answers, his analysis provides a way of thinking about problems. Thus, although he was writing specifically about Italian society in the early part of the twentieth century, he developed a conceptual approach which can be used to open up questions about other periods and situations.

It is important though to bear in mind Hall's reminder that Gramsci's "most illuminating ideas and formulations are typically of [a] conjunctural kind. To make more general use of them, they have to be delicately dis-interred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience" (Hall 1996, p.413). However, it is also true that although there have been huge changes in economic production since Gramsci's age, including post-Fordism and globalisation, and accompanying political

developments, nevertheless his analyses are of capitalist systems and liberal democracies, and of the crises they experience. His questions and concepts are therefore still of relevance while these forms continue to exist and to go through changes.

Much of Gramsci's work, because of his long imprisonment by the Italian fascists, is fragmentary, sometimes obscure, and is therefore difficult to interpret. He was grappling with complex ideas in the most difficult of circumstances, and therefore was not able to draw all his efforts into one coherent whole. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith refer to his difficulty "in finding a single, wholly satisfactory conception of 'civil society'"; and point to his several attempts to define the role of civil society in relation to the state (Gramsci, edited by Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971, pp.207-8). Despite these difficulties of definition, Gramsci provides enough useful and critical thinking to open up new and productive ways of approaching the idea of civil society, and of giving "a new meaning to a term that [had] become obsolete" (Simon 1991, p.72). A significant aspect of this new thinking is the conception of civil society as a distinct sphere, neither an all-embracing term covering society as a whole, nor conflated with the economic sphere. This aspect has proved to be especially useful in subsequent consideration of the structure and organisation of society.

Gramsci's definition of the actual make up and character of civil society is offered in a number of passages in the Prison Notebooks. He refers to "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private' ", in which the dominant group in society exercises its hegemony (p.12); "the so-called private organisations, like the church, the trade unions, the schools, etc" (p.56); "in the case of the most advanced States [...] 'civil society' has become a very complex

structure" (p.235); the "complexes of associations in civil society" (p.243). Roger Simon suggests that Gramsci's definition "includes all the organisations and institutions outside production and the state" (Simon 1991, p.70); while James Martin further refines this to "voluntary institutions and agents" (Martin 1998, p.71).

The precise definition of civil society – in terms of its make-up and character – today varies from writer to writer. Apart from the two specific and very different definitions outlined by Barber – those of free marketeers and of communitarians – commentators who subscribe to the broad notion of civil society as a 'third sphere' which is distinct from state and economy have put forward different suggestions as to what the term should include. Alexander, for instance, places both church and family outside civil society (2000, p.106) and the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics (2002) also excludes the family. Barber, on the other hand, includes both, but with the caveat that for the kind of civil society he aspires to these institutions need to become non-coercive and democratic. Gramsci's inclusion of schools is also remarked upon as being problematic (Simon 1991, p.72), because they are provided by the state, and have a significant compulsory element to them.

Despite these variations of interpretation, the linking theme of those writers who posit a notion of civil society as a third sphere is that the organisations and networks of which it consists are, or should be, voluntary in nature. Thus, the Centre for Civil Society defines civil society as consisting of "voluntary and non-profit organisations [...], philanthropic institutions, social and political movements"; Bhikhu Parekh refers to "the totality of relationships voluntarily entered into" (1993, p.160); and Barber speaks of "civic communities [...]

membership associations that are open and egalitarian enough to permit voluntary participation" (1998, p.35).

Integral to these definitions is the idea that civil society is characterised not only by its institutions, but also by its relationships and its values. Gibson argues that "the prevalence of social networks [is] a key attribute of a civil society (1998, p.4); while the Centre for Civil Society's definition includes as well "other forms of social participation and engagement and the values and cultural patterns associated with them." Alexander pins these down specifically as "interactional practices like civility, equality, criticism, and respect" (1998, p.7); Rod Fisher and Roger Fox include "tolerance and a willingness to associate with others" (Fisher and Fox 2001, p.24); and Barber (1998) adds inclusiveness, imagination, empathy, and responsibility. This is what Piotr Sztompka particularly refers to in his "cultural concept" of civil society: "the domain of cultural pre-suppositions, ingrained 'habits of the heart', values and norms, manners and mores, implicit understandings, frames and codes – shared by the members of society" (Sztompka 1998, p.193).

These ethical and cultural dimensions of civil society are also present in Gramsci's writings, through his account of hegemony in which the dominant class gains its position by consent as well as coercion, meaning that ideology and culture, and the organisations involved in culture and education, come to play crucial roles in the development of a society. It is this attention to the role of culture and consent that commentators regard as part of Gramsci's particular "originality" (Bellamy and Schecter 1993, p.135). Another important aspect of Gramsci's thinking about these issues is his conception that ideology is "embodied in [...] social practices" and is not simply an abstraction (Simon,

p.60; cf also Hall 1996, p.433). These aspects of his writings became influential in Britain in the 1970s and beyond, and particularly helped to inform the work of those involved in cultural studies, providing "intellectual and theoretical lines of connection to many [...] contemporary issues" (Hall 1996, p.417). Because cultural organisations could now be seen more clearly as central to the winning of consent by the dominant class, they therefore became legitimate objects of study in ways that had not been recognised before. Gramsci's approach provided a productive framework through which those organisations and their practices could be examined and more fully understood.

Civil society is not only the sphere in which the existing hegemony is maintained, but also the arena "where the subordinate social groups may organise their opposition and construct an alternative hegemony" (Simon 1991, p.27). And because cultural organisations play a significant role in winning consent for the dominant ideology and class, it follows that they can also be among the means by which that hegemony is questioned and challenged. In this dynamically conceived civil society, "different ideological currents [are] combined and contested" (Martin 1998, p.123), and the actors are engaged in processes of struggle and negotiation over the terms of their existence (Mercer, 1980). Civil society is thus conceived as a place of change and transition. It is a site of action, an arena of "reinvigorated civic activity" (Barber 1998, p.34), in which cultural organisations and practitioners are closely involved. The notion of civil society, as developed by Gramsci, therefore provides a useful and pertinent frame in which the idea of democratic involvement can be understood and further developed.

This is reflected in the stress, among writers in this field, on participation. Robert Fine, for instance, argues that "civil society theory expands rights of participation beyond anything envisaged in classical republicanism [...] and looks to a comprehensive public and political life beyond the official political institutions of government" (Fine 2000, p.117). Emphasis is also placed on the continuing extension of participation, so that the civic arena "becomes increasingly visible and 'open' to public debate" (Roniger, p.68); and on the "critical relationship between participation and power" (Barber, p.63), whereby "the deepening of popular participation" is necessary for the development of people's abilities and influence in "actually running" things (Hall 1987, p.21). This connects to Habermas's emphasis on the "problem-solving" capacity of associations in civil society (1996, p.367); and it links with another of Gramsci's arguments: the importance of "human agency and its transformative potential" (Martin 1998, p.76). In other words, democratic involvement and activity can intervene in and directly affect the environment in which people find themselves living and working.

This emphasis on participation also relates to the point made in Chapter 2, in the section on the shift from producers to consumers, about the way in which this shift has been paralleled by one that changes citizens into consumers. The latter are seen as atomised individuals who, in the cultural field, are in pursuit only of "various kinds of pleasures and satisfactions"; whereas citizens are also seeking information and understanding "as members of a community of active participants in the democratic process" (Hutchison 1999, pp.82-83). Thus, the re-awakened interest in civil society is not only a reaction to the problems of democracy, but also a response to the continuing development of a market society.

As mentioned earlier, despite the difficulty of finding in Gramsci's writing one definitive statement of civil society, for the most part he distinguishes the sphere of civil society from the other two spheres which make up the structure of society: the political and economic spheres. This distinction, though, is an analytical one rather than an actual separation, "merely methodological" rather than "organic" (Gramsci (ed. Hoare and Nowell Smith) 1971, p.160). In reality, the spheres are interlinked, together forming an integrated whole.

In a further explanation Gramsci relates the political and civil spheres to the state, with the state being described as the sum of political society and civil society. Of these two, political society refers to the coercive aspect of the state (laws, military power, etc), while civil society is where consent is gained for the dominant class and ideology. Again, these distinctions are analytical, as in fact there are overlaps between the coercive and consensual functions (Leversha 1977, p.118; Bellamy and Schecter 1993, p.119). Alexander argues strongly that civil society is not autonomous, but is interpenetrated by the other spheres, and in turn can affect those arenas (2000, p.98). Simon stresses that the distinction should not be seen as a physical one, and that because the spheres consist of social relations there can be interchanges between them (1991, p.72).

This sense of interconnection between the different arenas, and the possibility of influence from one to the other is not shared by all writers on civil society. In this context it is important to note the tone of caution sounded by some as to the limits of what can be achieved by activity in the civil sphere. In this view, opinions expressed in civil society and the actions of extra-parliamentary organisations and movements can have an effect only if given institutionalised voice and status in the parliamentary and legislative arena; and the only changes

civil society can achieve are within its own sphere, with "at most an indirect effect on the self-transformation of the political system" (Habermas, p.372).

However, a further aspect of Gramsci's thinking – an enlarged conception of the political stage – suggests that this view of the limits of activity in civil society could itself be limited in its perception of what may be possible. Gramsci's concern with defining civil society arose from his analysis of the differences between the politically undeveloped state in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century and that of western European nations. In his estimation, the latter had a much more sophisticated civil society, in which a range of organisations and institutions played a part in developing, maintaining or challenging the ideologies and values of society (Gramsci (ed. Hoare and Nowell Smith) 1971, p.238). It was this expanded notion of who are the significant actors in society, and the enlarged view of democracy that accompanied it, that was a key factor in drawing attention to Gramsci's thinking in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. Simon suggests that this expanded conception of political actors and activity, "in all spheres of life", arises specifically from Gramsci's idea of civil society (1991, p.88). It opens up "new terrains" for democratic engagement (Mercer 1980, p.128), and leads to an understanding that power is found throughout society, and is not limited to conventionally understood state power. It therefore provides a conceptual framework for examining the place of culture in society, and the part played by practitioners.

3.2.2 Arts Practitioners in Civil Society

How, then, does the concept of civil society help in our understanding of the role of arts practitioners in policy-making?[7] Firstly, it provides us with a way of seeing arts organisations as part of those 'voluntary', 'private' associations which make up civil society, and which have a relationship with both government and markets, but are also distinct from them.[8]

Secondly, the conception of civil society as an important arena of contestation and of participation – the "sphere of all the [...] struggles which arise out of the different ways in which people are grouped together" (Simon 1991, p.70) – enables us to consider that arts organisations are not simply passive but can and do operate actively within the sphere of civil society. As discussed above, Gramsci's conception of civil society opens up the idea that actors in civil society are involved both in the maintenance of hegemony, and in challenging and changing it – both "consenting and resisting" (Mercer 1980, p.135). In cultural studies this understanding has been used to investigate the role of culture in both maintaining and challenging hegemony. But such an insight can equally be applied to cultural policy, to the mechanisms by which culture is governed as well as to its content and structure. It therefore provides a conceptual framework for examining the role of arts practitioners not only in creating their art but also in organising their work and institutions, and in developing the policies within which those organisations operate and by which culture is disseminated.

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[7] The following points of course apply broadly to participation in all public policy areas; and they apply not only to the participation of practitioners but also, for example, of individuals and communities. But the point emphasised in this thesis is that arts practitioners and their organisations have not been widely recognised in cultural policy research as having such a role; and the concept of civil society is very helpful in illuminating the part they play. The *particular* role of culture and cultural organisations in civil society has already been indicated in this chapter, and is further discussed at the end of this section.

[8] This point is also made, briefly, in McGuigan, 2004b, pp.51,132.

Thirdly, the concept can be used not only to understand existing conditions, but also to suggest changes in those conditions. Since civil society is conceived as the arena for contestation, it follows that it is also the sphere for realising change and transformation. The use of the term as an aspiration for what might be achieved, as well as a description of what already exists, appears in many writings on civil society. Barber, for example, emphasises this aspect, saying that "we must inquire what it means not only as a description of social organization but as a prescription for how society might ideally be organized, how one might treat the ills of living democracy or catalyze democratization in societies not yet free." (Barber 1998, p.10). Similarly, Andreas Hess points to a critical stance in the use of the concept, which "serves the purpose of making democracy more democratic" (Hess 2000, p.92). The usefulness of using the term conceptually is therefore that it allows a conception of change and aspiration as well as simply describing what exists. By applying this approach to the question of practitioner involvement in policy-making a framework is provided in which to consider not only whether arts workers do have a role in policy formation, but also whether they should do so, and how that involvement might be achieved and enhanced.

Alexander (1998, 2000), however, warns that the aspirational approach of some writers on civil society has led to an idealism which disregards the presence and influence of other spheres, and therefore has difficulty operating in the real world. This is an important reminder of the need for caution when using the term prescriptively. Gramsci's approach, based on an analysis of how society operates and is structured, provides a basis and a guideline for rooting an aspirational discussion of practitioner involvement in an understanding and analysis of existing practice, and therefore of developing strategies to extend and enhance that involvement. Therefore, rather than projecting in utopian fashion a future

structure or method of participation, it makes possible an assessment of current arrangements in which changes can be envisaged, and provides a framework for posing the question as to whether practitioner involvement should be considered in principle and how it might be put into practice.

Barber similarly responds to Alexander's warning, with a series of "practical strategies" (1998, p.69) that propose six areas – including the arts – in which steps can be taken, through legislation and wide-ranging activity, to develop and extend civil society, and engage civil society associations. Using this approach, civil society is rescued "from being an esoteric normative ideal or a remote subject of nostalgic memory or, worse yet, some social-science construct" (Barber 1998, p.112). Instead, it sheds light on the place and role of arts practitioners in relation to the democratic process of policy-making, as part of a civil society that is conceived as a sphere of participation and transformation.

There is a further point to consider, which is whether arts practitioners and their organisations have a *special* place in the discussion, and concept, of civil society. The relationship between culture and society as a whole is of course very complex (cf. Williams, [1958] 1971) and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in this long-running debate. Nevertheless, the present chapter has indicated that culture and cultural organisations do have a particular relationship to civil society. Gramsci, as we have seen, highlights the importance to civil society of those organisations and institutions which have a "connection with the elaboration and diffusion of culture" (Bobbio 1979, p.40); and the question of their relationship has been taken up and developed by commentators on both civil society and culture.

Henrik Kaare Nielsen, for example, discusses the role of cultural policy as a "guarantor for [...] democratic cultural debate and civic interaction" (2003, p.244). Barber (1998) describes the arts, together with the humanities, as "an indispensable foundation for a free, pluralistic society" (p.75), and refers to "the cultural infrastructure of civil society" (p.108). For both these writers, culture and civil society have a symbiotic relationship: culture makes it possible to conceive of a democratic society in which the values and practices of civil society flourish, and at the same time it plays an important role in creating and nurturing those very attributes and practices. In this light, the role of arts practitioners in policy-making is of note not only for reasons of their own democratic involvement, but also because they are engaged in creating the culture which contributes to, and is an integral part of, civil society.

3.3 Civil Society, Democratisation, and Governance

This section brings together the distinctions made at the beginning of this chapter – those of the processes and principles of involvement – to combine the discussion of democratisation and governance with that of civil society.

In their selection from the Prison Notebooks, Hoare and Nowell Smith open the section titled 'State and Civil Society' with Gramsci's discussion of the "conflict between 'represented and representatives' " (1971, p.210). As we have seen, this is also the starting point in most of the commentary on democratisation and democracy. Beyond this common starting point the two discussions can also help to shed light on each other, and together create an analysis that is both conceptual and useful. Thus, the concept of civil society provides a theoretical underpinning

for the criticisms of existing forms of democracy and the practical steps suggested for improving it; while the development of ideas for democratisation provides the practical means by which conceptions of civil society may be prevented from succumbing to idealism.

The way in which the concept of civil society enriches the discussion of democratisation and governance is particularly through its contribution to understanding the role of democratic participation in society. There are two aspects to this: one is that the concepts of both the state and democracy are themselves expanded; the other, that participation is critical to democracy and is directly linked to power.

The conceptual expansion of state and democracy arises because the inclusion of civil society as part of the state means that a wider range of actors and issues is brought into play than those taken into account by a bifurcated view of society as consisting only of the governing state and the economic sphere. These points of action and contention increase "as the structures of the modern state and society complexify" (Hall 1987, p.20). It is within this complexity that the notion of governance, discussed earlier, becomes both relevant and possible. Governance is conceived as the partnership of government and a range of non-statutory organisations – these are precisely the 'private', voluntary organisations of civil society, existing independently of political society and therefore able to enter into partnership with government. An understanding of the character of civil society, both as it presently exists and as it might become, and its relation to 'political society', can help to deepen the way that the partnerships of governance are conceived. Thus, the involvement of cultural practitioners in policy-making can be understood not as an irrelevant nuisance, but as an example of the active

realisation of governance in a varied and dynamic civil society. In this way the concept of civil society also provides a further way of considering the relation between special interests and the 'common good', and of showing how the tension between them can be a productive and necessary one.

Secondly, civil society is the arena in which people, both individually and through organisations, participate in society as a whole. Participation is the very essence of civil society; and as such it links the civil society concept directly to the ideas and experiments in democratisation discussed earlier – both providing a basis for those practical measures and at the same time making civil society concrete and practicable. As we have seen, the concept of civil society also links participation to the question of power. Because the concept opens up the understanding that power is diffused throughout society, participation too needs to be conceived widely, to be recognised as occurring in the multiple spaces of civil society and involving a wide range of actors. This is why measures for democratisation are to be found across such a wide variety of issues, and why questions of participation in specific fields, including those of cultural policy, are relevant to the consideration of the functioning of a democratic society.

Furthermore, this connection of participation to power provides a means of clarifying the 'status' and purpose of civic engagement, which is often represented by the term 'active citizenship'. This notion is frequently contained implicitly, if not put forward explicitly, in discussions of democratisation. Active citizenship has been posited by some commentators (and particularly by some politicians) as an alternative to democratic government, promoting the activity of voluntary organisations and active individuals in areas of life which have previously been undertaken by governments, and thereby reducing the

commitment of government to those matters. But the concept of civil society allows active citizenship to stand for the enlargement of democracy that has been argued for by proponents of participative forms of decision-making. In this context it is seen as something which adds to government, or improves ways of governing; giving more control to non-governmental organisations and individuals, while not eliminating representative government nor its responsibilities in providing resources to those non-governmental associations and networks. The concept of civil society therefore provides an explanation which clarifies that active participation in the civic arena is part of an organic whole, and is essential to extending and deepening democracy.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed developments in democratisation and the growth of governance as part of the context in which arts practitioners' engagement in cultural policy-making takes place. It has also examined key problematic issues thrown up by democratisation and wider participation. These will be returned to in succeeding chapters, in relation to the particular instance of British cultural policy and especially the case study of new playwriting policy. The chapter has also brought forward the concept of civil society as a powerful explanatory tool for reflecting on the involvement of arts practitioners in the cultural policy process.

By bringing together these themes of democratisation, governance and civil society, a framework and a rationale are created in which to consider the question of practitioners' participation in cultural policy activity. They suggest that arts

practitioners are part of the make-up of the civic arena and that their involvement in policy-making either is already, or could become, part of civic engagement and governance. Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to conceive that the development and extension of their involvement is not only a matter of arts practitioners' own self-interest, but – as part of a renewed and expanded participation in the multiple sites of power in society – would make a contribution to the maintenance and enlargement of democratic life in the future as well as in the present. These concepts can therefore be usefully applied to cultural policy not only descriptively but also prescriptively.

Chapter 2 focused particularly on the debates about practitioner involvement in the post-war period up to the 1980s, and the factors that inhibited those debates in the 1980s and 1990s. The developments in thinking about democracy outlined above have gathered pace in the 1990s and into the 21st century. They are especially useful, therefore, in helping to trace the development of ideas and practice in cultural policy-making from the early 1990s onwards. But, as this chapter has also shown, ideas about civil society were emerging from the 1970s. Although they were rarely referred to in the specific discussions about participation in cultural policy-making, they nevertheless contributed to the context of that time in which those discussions took place. Raymond Williams in particular was not only a contributor to the debate about the democratisation of the Arts Council, but was also one of the leading explorers of ideas that laid the ground for a politics in which civil society was of key importance (Kenny, 1995). Moreover, these ideas can now help to add a further dimension and insight into those earlier debates, in addition to providing a framework for considering more recent developments in the cultural policy field.

The following chapters examine the specific case of policy-making for new playwriting in England, and consider the extent to which the concepts explored in this chapter are applicable and useful in understanding the question of the involvement of practitioners in developing those policies.

PART II

THE CASE STUDY

Chapter 4

Theatre Writing Policy in England Since 1945[1]

In order to anchor, illustrate, and test out the conceptual and theoretical arguments of Part I of the thesis, it is necessary to examine a concrete instance in which practitioner involvement in policy activity might be evident. As discussed in the Introduction, the case study approach is particularly appropriate for such investigation. The focus of my case study here is new playwriting policy in England.

The reasons for focusing on playwriting policy for this case study are threefold. Firstly, my earlier short paper on British theatre writing (Woddis, 1997) indicated that it is a policy area that could provide a useful focus for examining the role of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making. The study found instances of practitioners in this field attempting to influence policy, and doing so in an organised way: setting up their own associations for this purpose and undertaking a range of activities and campaigns. Secondly, new writing itself is essential for the future of theatre, and for maintaining theatre's capacity for interpreting and understanding contemporary society. The policies governing and shaping the circumstances in which new plays are created and presented thus form a subject that is interesting and important in its own right. Lastly, because new playwriting has this dynamic role in relation to the artform, it suggests a policy arena in which the processes of policy formation and implementation might particularly

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[1] As explained in the Introduction, while the focus of this case study is England, until 1994 the Arts Council's remit was for Britain as a whole; therefore much of the national material examined in this chapter covers Britain rather than England specifically. However, the regional and local dimensions discussed here relate to England only.

be in flux and open to influence. All these factors therefore suggested that this would be a fruitful case in which to explore the wider subject of arts practitioners' role in policy-making.

In this and the succeeding chapters the concepts examined in Part I will be considered, to ascertain both if they are evident in practice and if they help to explain the engagement of theatre practitioners in playwriting policy.

Firstly, in order to understand more fully the activities and approaches of theatre practitioners in relation to theatre writing policies, it is necessary to know something about those policies, including their content, where and how they are generated, and their context, and to be aware of the key issues of debate in them that have driven practitioners to seek involvement in policy development.

The three principal actors in the field are the arts funders, theatre companies, and playwrights. The main focus of this and the following chapters is the relationship between theatre practitioners (playwrights and theatre companies) and the arts funding system, and between playwrights and theatre companies. In other words, theatre practitioners in general are affected by, and therefore attempt to affect, the policies of the public bodies providing the funding for new theatre writing. However, as playwrights are also dependent on theatres producing new plays, they also seek to influence the policies of those theatres.

This chapter gives an account of policies in the arts funding system related to new theatre writing since 1945. It also considers key issues that arise from them and have been the subject of some contention. The chapter therefore, necessarily, begins to examine points at which practitioners have been engaged in debate and

have made or tried to make inputs into policy, although this engagement is more closely considered in the following chapters.

It should be noted that policy statements focusing only on new playwriting are comparatively rare. For the most part such statements form an element of wider policy relating either to theatre more generally or to the arts as a whole. These policies are found in the national and regional arts funding quangos (the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Boards/Associations), and in the cultural strategies of local councils. Policy on new playwriting is also affected by the goals and directions of national government. The following sections of the chapter therefore consider policy within these three categories: national government, arts funding quangos, and local government, before going on to discuss aspects of those policies.

4.1 National Government: Setting Parameters for Artform Policies

As already indicated, national governments in Britain have, since 1945, adopted the 'arm's length' principle of arts funding. As far as particular artforms are concerned, therefore, governments have not sought as a general rule to develop their own specific artform policies, leaving this instead to the Arts Councils and regional arts bodies; and, with rare exception, nor have they attempted to influence those of artists or arts institutions. However, they have developed policies more broadly in relation to the arts, and have sought to influence and shape the policies and operations of the arts funding bodies. These moves inevitably have an impact on artists and their work. Policies such as those advocating the raising of educational ability, social inclusion, and economic

regeneration through cultural activity, have all influenced the content and approach of arts practitioners; and, as discussed in Chapter 2, wider political ideologies, as well as the amount of money made available by government for the arts, have also affected the organisation and product of artists and arts organisations.

The 1965 White Paper, *A Policy for the Arts: the First Steps*, was the first national strategy for the arts introduced by national government in Britain, and illustrates this approach. With regard to individual artforms, including theatre, it mainly reiterates the Arts Council's existing policies and activities in support of specific arts institutions and grant schemes. The new proposals it puts forward take a broad approach across the arts. They include a substantial increase in arts funding particularly for developing artists, for arts organisations – including "to ease the financial burdens of provincial repertory theatres" (Cmnd 2601, 1965, p.17), and to support a building fund to meet the "dearth of good local buildings for showing and practising the arts" (p.12). However, as indicated in Chapter 1, the architect of the White Paper, Jennie Lee, warned that it would "take time" for coherent and detailed policy to be developed (Cmnd 2601, p.16). Indeed, one of her successors, Hugh Jenkins, observed in 1979 that "there is still nothing coherent about the relationship of government to the arts" (Jenkins 1979, p.54).

It is not until the establishment in 1992 of the Department for National Heritage, and then in 1997 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, that there has been a greater willingness by government to elaborate cultural policy. This has been accompanied by the production of an increasing number of reports and policy papers across the range of the Department's remit. For the arts, however, while the DNH and subsequently DCMS have provided broad objectives and

guidelines, responsibility for the detailed and specific artform policies and schemes is still seen as lying with the Arts Council. Thus, soon after the DNH was set up, its Secretary of State, Peter Brooke, stated that "we expect the bodies we support to conduct their day-to-day operations, and to exercise their very proper independent judgement in dealing with particular clients, within an overall framework of priorities and public policies determined by Government" (Taylor 1997, p.445). Similarly, the report of the Government's Policy Action Team 10 to the Social Exclusion Unit, which helped to set the framework for the arts under Tony Blair's first Labour Government, promotes the use of arts, leisure and sport in community regeneration and social participation, but leaves the Arts Council to show "how it plans to embed the best practice principles contained in [the report] in its policy and funding decisions" (DCMS 1999b, p.16).[2]

While theatre practitioners have taken action to influence policy at this national governmental level (making inputs into parliamentary review bodies; holding meetings with arts ministers; or lobbying members of Parliament and demonstrating in protest against cuts in arts funding) their main focus at national level is the Arts Council, because it is here that the detailed national policies and funding schemes have to be engaged with. The following section therefore gives an account of the Arts Council's policies for new playwriting, before the chapter goes on to examine the policies of RABs and local authorities, and then to consider issues arising from these policies and practices.

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[2] It is the nature of these parameters that has caused particular criticism of national government policy for the arts, because "it would appear that government objectives are becoming more and more removed from the arts, more of what the government wants and less of what the arts need" (Quinn 1997, p.152). As already noted, there has been considerable (though not universal) disquiet in the arts community, echoed by writers and commentators in the field, at the way in which the broad goals and priorities of government set limits and direction to those specific arts policies that are not directly related to the form and content of the arts themselves.

4.2 Theatre Writing Policies : The Arts Council

Arts Council policy on new theatre writing can be found both explicitly and implicitly expressed in a variety of published documents. These are primarily the annual reports of the Council, specific policy statements, and a range of reports and discussion papers.

From the beginning of its existence the Arts Council's annual reports make reference to new writing for the theatre. As an implicit policy of approval and encouragement, it appears in the descriptions of individual theatres' work: that is, the production of new plays during a season is seen as a noteworthy event. Thus, the production of a new Sean O'Casey play is described as "one of the most delightful successes of recent years" (ACGB 1947, p.23); the "valuable work" of repertory theatres includes giving "several dramatists the opportunity of seeing their first plays produced" (ACGB 1948, p.14); and the first production of T.S.Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* is designated a "remarkable success" (ACGB 1950, p.20). By the time we reach the *Thirteenth Annual Report*, of 1957/58, the reader is informed that four out of twelve of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's productions that year were first performances, that the Bristol Old Vic had "once again a strong representation of work from new playwrights", and that the Lincoln Theatre Association "has given some remarkably vigorous productions of new plays" (pp.38-41). This report goes on to speak approvingly of the work of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court – a theatre that was formed precisely to discover and present new plays – saying that it has "firmly established for itself both here and abroad a leading reputation in contemporary theatre [and] has stimulated more theatrical discussion than the productions of any other management" (p.41).

However, alongside these notes of praise, concern is also expressed over the standard of new plays; and it is to address this problem that more explicit indications of policy appear. In its report for 1950/51, the Arts Council refers to its policy for the Festival of Britain, which included the encouragement of "important productions of contemporary work", but goes on to reflect that "it was disappointing that so few contemporary plays of merit emerged for the occasion" (pp.6-7). In the same year the Council offered four prizes for new plays that could be produced by repertory theatres. Again, the outcome was "disappointing", and only two prizes (and a "consolation" prize) were awarded (p.26). In the following year's report the Council refers to its "effort to stimulate the writing of suitable plays", by making awards to repertory theatres for the production of new works; "but none proved an outstanding success" (ACGB 1952, p.35). The report therefore announces "a more ambitious scheme to assist new drama", to be introduced the next year.

Thus, in 1952, the Arts Council began a funding scheme to provide support to playwrights and theatre companies for the writing and production of new plays. The scheme consisted of bursaries given directly to writers, and guarantees against loss for theatres producing new plays. These guarantees included the proviso that there would be two weeks of rehearsal – an unusual occurrence at that time, when one-week rehearsal periods were common, and was thus an attempt to bring about an improvement in the standard of production of new plays. In the first five years of the scheme, 58 plays received their first production, and eight bursaries were provided to writers. The Arts Council's 1957/58 annual report asserts that "It is no exaggeration of the valuable work of the repertory theatres to say that with the help of the Arts Council's scheme they

have done more towards encouraging new writers than all the West End managements put together" (pp.45-46).

However, notwithstanding these comments, the same report also states that "the problem of finding new plays of quality is as acute as ever" (ACGB 1958, p.41). This is in spite of the mechanism that had been established to ensure that plays not fitting this description would be filtered out. Under the New Drama scheme, playscripts submitted were to be read by a sub-committee of the Arts Council's Drama Panel "thus, it is hoped, minimising the risks entailed in selecting and trying out new plays" (ACGB 1952, p.35). Similarly, playwrights seeking the Arts Council's bursaries would have to be nominated by "responsible members of the theatrical or literary professions" (ibid.). These procedures, as we have already seen (Chapter 2), were later to be criticised as part of the undemocratic structure of the Arts Council, and for the lack of clarity over policy and the definition of quality.

On the whole, the Arts Council appears well satisfied with its approach to new playwriting. Its 1958/59 report refers to "an impressive crop of young playmakers", and asserts that the Council's new writing schemes "have kept many talents and many theatres alive" and "have been largely responsible for the notable increase in the amount of new work staged by Britain's leading reps. in the past two years" (p.11). By the 1964/65 report, its Drama Panel is reporting that "these schemes have been of quite exceptional value, not only in the provinces, but to the theatre of this country as a whole" (p.80); and in 1977 the retiring Drama Director writes that "these schemes have positively encouraged new writing for the theatre" (ACGB 1977, p.21).

As for the *purpose* of supporting new work, it is to "continually refresh [...] the scene" (ACGB 1958, p.38); for a theatre "which relies only on its classical traditions and past successes is living on its capital and will inevitably become an exhausted theatre, out of touch with each succeeding generation" (ACGB 1965, p.25). In the 1990s, reflecting the period's priorities of access, "a surge of new writing" is cited as a key factor in creating new audiences (ACGB 1993a, p.14).

References to new plays appear also in a number of general policy and discussion documents of the Arts Council. *The Glory of the Garden* (1984) was concerned primarily with devolution in the arts funding system. Among its priorities "for the future health of the theatre in England" it includes an increase in funds for new playwriting (p.17). However, apart from its recognition of the Royal Court Theatre's "honoured place in theatrical history" for its presentation of new plays and discovery of playwrights (p.27), the report seems to suggest that the place for new theatre writing is in studio theatres rather than on the main stages of repertory companies.[3] As will be illustrated later in the chapter, the restriction of new plays to studio spaces has been one of the particular concerns of theatre practitioners over many years. *The Glory of the Garden* does propose an increase in funding for new writing, to be shared with other suggested developments in drama. But, in order to finance these new activities, it also announces the Council's decision to withdraw grants from fifteen theatre companies, including some which were themselves producing new work.

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[3] "The Council will look to the companies concerned to play a full part in arranging activities beyond the staging of productions in their own main houses [...] for example, expanded seasons of studio work (with particular emphasis on new writing)" (ACGB 1984, p.16).

These proposed cuts caused uproar in the arts community. Members of the Drama Panel resigned in protest and a motion of no-confidence in the Arts Council was put forward by forty-two artistic directors (Hewison, pp.255-256). In the event, *The Glory of the Garden* failed to deliver its promise: it neither heralded a new strategy for the arts as a whole, nor resulted in all the threatened cuts (Hewison, p.255, Witts, p.336). With regard to theatre in particular, the Arts Council's own enquiry report three years later, *Theatre **Is** For All*, concluded that "overall, the effect of the policy is not yet either to improve the general lot of theatres in the regions nor to develop a great deal of new activity" (ACGB 1986, p.11).[4]

In 1990 a major discussion and consultation was initiated by the Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce, to produce a national arts and media strategy (which became known in its abbreviation as NAMS). The process (co-ordinated by the Arts Council, in collaboration with other arts funders) consisted of three stages: discussion papers contributed by a variety of writers in 1991 (forty-four in all, including one on drama, edited by Paul Barnard, Assistant Drama Director of the Arts Council); a draft strategy document, *Towards a National Arts and Media Strategy* (ACGB 1992); and the final publication, *A Creative Future: The way forward for the arts, crafts and media in England* (ACGB 1993b).

The NAMS consultation process was widespread and taken seriously by the arts community. A number of the playwrights' organisations – the Writers and Theatres Strategy Group, the Theatre Writers' Union, and New Playwrights'

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[4] As will be pointed out later in this section, enquiry reports do not necessarily represent the official view of the Arts Council itself. Thus, the critical verdict of the *Theatre **Is** For All* report, and of other commentators, is not reflected in the Arts Council's own assessment of *The Glory of the Garden* (ACGB [1989]), which asserted that "the successes greatly outweigh the failures" (p.2).

Trust – made written contributions (the paper from NPT arising out of a meeting it organised of fifty writers).

However, few new initiatives for supporting new writing appear in *A Creative Future*. One proposal that is included is to provide "funds for centres of innovation [...] where new work [...] can be developed which in many cases will result in public performance, but where the emphasis will be on the process rather than on the outcome" (p.61). It is put forward in the context of a chapter on 'artistic originality and development', which argues for funding to provide artists with "time and space in which to experiment" (p.56), and for "access to a wide range of opportunities to practise their art" (p.60). In the event, the proposal for centres of innovation did not make the transition from paper to bricks and mortar.

This kind of approach was, though, favoured by theatre practitioners as a way of developing and supporting new plays and playwrights; and both at the time and in subsequent years some initiatives were undertaken by writers' groups and theatre companies to operate facilities along these lines or to undertake similar kinds of schemes. The Writing House, for example, was set up in 1998 as a joint initiative by Theatre Absolute, a small touring company specialising in new writing, and the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, so that writers could work closely with directors and actors on a piece of work at any stage of its development. This might be at the early stage of exploring an idea or "road-testing and if necessary re-working" a script.[5] There would be no pressure on writers to produce for a specific timetable, but at the same time the two theatres expressed a commitment

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[5] Chris O'Connell & Julia Negus, 'What exactly *is* the Writing House?', Theatre Absolute, [1998(?)].

to seeing the work eventually produced. In a similar initiative, when the Soho Theatre in London re-opened in its new building in 2000 it incorporated in this development a 'Writers' Centre'. Its aim was to support playwrights and new writing by providing writers with space in which to work, in addition to its programme of workshops, dramaturgical support, rehearsed readings, and showcase productions.

There was a feeling in the arts community that, after all the effort put into the NAMS process, not a great deal came out of it. The director of one of the writers' organisations remarked that it had been "effectively binned".[6] A similar view is expressed by Robert Hewison, who states that the report as a whole "was ignored by the Department of National Heritage" (Hewison 1995, p.263). Certainly, in the years immediately after its publication the level of the Arts Council's grant ('standstill' for three consecutive years between 1993 and 1996, according to ACE's 1995/96 annual report (ACE 1996a)) prevented it from expanding its operations in the ways envisaged in *A Creative Future*. It was left to theatre practitioners themselves to put into practice some of the proposals contained in it.

Policy on new writing naturally features also in those Arts Council documents specifically dealing with the theatre. Among the first of these is the 1970 report, *The Theatre Today in England and Wales*. Beyond praising the Arts Council for the financial support it is already giving to both the national theatres and the regional repertory theatres to produce new plays, this report makes no further suggestions for developing and supporting playwrights. Indeed, it questions any continuation of the Council's bursaries scheme in favour of giving support

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[6] Comment to the author, January 1997.

directly to theatres, particularly in the form of guarantees to enable them to "take a risk" with new plays (p.40). In fact, as will be seen in more detail later in the chapter, this sort of approach was for many years seen by playwrights as inadequate, resulting in money 'disappearing' into theatres' overall budgets as a result of inadequate monitoring of what should have been earmarked funds.

The next major attempt by the Arts Council to examine theatre provision and policy was in 1985, when it set up a working party under the chairmanship of Kenneth Cork. The enquiry team considered consultation with theatre practitioners to be important to the process: its terms of reference stated that its work would be carried out "at all stages involving the profession and its representative bodies" (ACGB 1986, p.1). It received submissions from over a hundred individuals, thirty theatre companies, and fifty organisations, including writers' groups; held five meetings in association with Regional Arts Associations; and visited twenty-two theatre companies.

The resulting report, *Theatre **Is** For All* (also known as the Cork Report), was published in 1986. One of its main recommendations is for some theatres to be designated as "national new writing theatres", for which activity they would receive extra funds (p.6). In the event, this proposal was received "unenthusiastically" by the Arts Council, according to an assessment ten years afterwards by the secretaries to the enquiry team (Brown and Brannen 1996, p.373). *Theatre **Is** For All* devotes several pages to new work, and emphasises its importance for the "international reputation" and vitality of British theatre (p.25). However, it expresses serious concern at the "damage done by under-funding", and states that "it is hard to escape the conclusion that the seedbed of theatrical development in England is being neglected and dying" (p.27). Its

proposal for national new writing theatres is put forward in this context, along with recommendations for putting the work of 'project-funded' companies on a more secure footing through revenue grants, and for continuing the Arts Council's New Writing schemes.

However, a pertinent point about enquiries such as the Cork Enquiry is that although established by the Arts Council, their reports are recommendations only, and cannot be assumed to represent the policy of the Arts Council itself. In the case of the Cork Enquiry, according to its secretary and assistant secretary, an argument was engaged from the beginning over whether the outcome would simply be a "cost-cutting exercise" (Brown and Brannen, p.369). The enquiry team took a broader view, not only producing a report which advocated increased funding, but operating with terms of reference which also considered the "creative [and] philosophical" needs of both theatre companies and theatre as an art form (ACGB 1986, p.1). In the event, the Arts Council "scotched at once" one of the report's recommendations and took up some of the others "only in a limited sense" (Brown and Brannen, p.371).

In 1996 the Arts Council (by this time, reorganised as the Arts Council of England) published its first dedicated policy statement on theatre. *The Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* was produced out of a process of consultation that began with a 'Green Paper' which, according to the Council's annual report for 1994/95, was "itself based on extensive consultations with Regional Arts Boards [...] and practitioners" (ACE 1995, p.20). The published policy document contextualises its strategy in an introduction that details the "crisis" affecting theatre in England and its adverse impact on new writing (pp.2-

3). It thus includes in its aims the support of new writing and its production, and support for playwrights themselves.

In a section specifically on new work, the document emphasises that new writing is "a priority" which is "essential to the continuing vitality and cultural relevance of drama"; and it argues for sufficient resources to be made available for such work to be properly developed as "a part of the programme of work of all companies" (p.16). Such resources include funds for research and development – allowing artists to "have more opportunity to experiment without the obligation to create a 'finished product' ", and for the longer rehearsal periods that are widely recognised in the theatre community as being necessary for the production of new plays (pp.16 and 26).

The document concludes by setting out its priorities for attention, though most of those related to new work are rather vague assertions, such as the aims to "support the process of creating new work" and to "give greater priority to the need for long-term support in the development of new work" (p.27).

In 1999 the Arts Council set up another enquiry into theatre whose impact was more significant than that of earlier enquiries of this nature, both in terms of its influence on Arts Council policy and in its effect on the funding of theatres and theatre companies. The Council brought in a firm of consultants, Peter Boyden Associates, to review regional theatre provision under the guidance of a steering group made up of arts funders and theatre practitioners. Initially focused on the fifty English regional producing theatres, its investigation broadened into a consideration of what it termed "the wider theatre ecology" (Peter Boyden Associates 2000b, p.4). This change of emphasis was the result not only of the

enquiry's investigations, but also came out of the consultation process. As a consequence, although the data presented in the report is drawn only from the regional theatres, the conclusions are applied more widely.

In relation to new writing, its scarcity is seen as one of the symptoms of the decline of theatre more generally (2000b, p.20), and its development as a key component of the future "health of the theatre and [...] the wider creative industries" (2000b, p.37). Specifically, the report seeks to make it possible for theatres to commission new plays as a matter of course, and to offer services such as rehearsed readings to develop new writing.

The Boyden review produced two reports, in January and May 2000; and initiated a widespread consultation process. Interwoven with this procedure, the Arts Council itself reviewed its national theatre policy. Based on the findings of the Boyden report, it produced first a discussion paper in May 2000, *The Next Stage: Towards a National Policy for Theatre in England*, and then a final policy document in July the same year. A short and largely aspirational statement, it makes no reference to new writing *per se*, referring only to the all-embracing term of "new work" in its overall priorities (p.3). 'New work' of course may include new approaches to very old work. The National Policy thus offers a rather blunt instrument for developing strategies and action on new playwriting.

The greater immediate impact of the Boyden review lay in its proposal for increased funding, which was taken up by the Arts Council whose Chairman argued for £25million to "bring about a true transformation", in which he included "encouragement of living writers" (Robinson 2000, p.14). In a short space of time this demand had been agreed to by the Government and, after a

convoluted process of negotiation between the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Boards, announcements were made in March 2001 that most of the regional producing theatres and a small proportion of small-scale companies had been awarded increases in their annual grants (some receiving large percentage uplifts). In terms of both the Arts Council and RABs' intentions, and theatre companies' plans, these rises were expected to lead to an increase in new theatre writing.

In conclusion, Arts Council policy on new theatre writing can be seen to have begun from the earliest days of the Council, with an implicit attitude of support for new plays, and to have developed into a series of funding schemes. These schemes included support both for writers through commissions, bursaries, residencies, and awards, and for theatre companies in the form of production costs for new plays and (for a time) second productions. Funding support was also provided for a short while for writers' organisations and writing development activities, but these did not survive financial cutbacks. The Arts Council's policies also recognised the additional demands made by new plays, particularly for longer rehearsal periods. At times, and with varying degrees of sophistication, the Council has also attempted to provide an explication of the importance of new playwriting to the future of theatre, which lies behind its promotion of these schemes. We have also seen, however, that many recommendations made in enquiry reports, and even in final policy documents, have not been enacted.

Thus, for the most part, the focus of Arts Council policy on new playwriting has been the provision of financial support for individual writers and production costs for theatres. Such support has been welcomed by theatre practitioners, and

defended by them when under threat; but they have also sought to widen this focus. Playwrights' associations have campaigned for financial support for their own organisations' work with writers and theatres; literary managers and theatre directors have argued for new approaches to the Arts Council's new writing schemes to allow for different activities to be supported as well, such as collaborations between building-based and touring companies, young people's writing workshops and showcases which bring together new and experienced writers, experimental work involving theatre writing with other media; and practitioners have also made suggestions for funding to be given to activities not directly leading to commissions and productions, such as workshops, and 'script centres' where play scripts might be reproduced and archived. Some of these have in fact been taken on for some periods in the Arts Council's history, but have then been the victim of funding cuts. Others have either simply not been accepted or their potential has not been grasped. Theatre practitioners have therefore continued to argue for improvement and change in the Arts Council's new writing policies.

4.3 Theatre Writing Policies: Regional Arts Boards

Theatre policies are also produced by the regional arts funders. These include policy statements, studies of theatre provision in particular areas, reviews of policy and funding schemes, and consultation documents on specific aspects of theatre policy. Unsurprisingly, they vary from region to region, both in quantity and focus. It is not feasible here to give an account of all these documents, but a

sample of those available in one year[7] will indicate the range of approach and content in such reports.

A Review of Theatre Provision in the North-West of England was published by the North West Arts Board in January 1997, and came out of a consultation process that ran through 1995 and 1996. The final report is a wide-ranging document which surveys the theatre activity in the region, including the work of the regional playwrights' organisation, and sets it in the context of funding cuts in the arts, as well as in the particulars of the region (such as local institutions, events and communities). It also considers issues such as artistic quality and audiences. It concludes by outlining a strategy and making recommendations for action. These include a section on new writing "without which the theatre stultifies" (p.40). It also proposes that an annual audit of new writing in the region should be undertaken and that assistance should be given to "the process of further exploiting new work generated in the region" (p.40). Finally, the report stresses that its strategy cannot be further developed or put into action without "full endorsement" by the other bodies and individuals active in the field (p.43).

In the same month, January 1997, South West Arts produced what it described as an "issues paper" which was specifically on new writing for the theatre. Its aim was to widen a consultation that had already begun between the RAB and writers in the region. The result of this process was a short document, *New Theatre Writing* [1998], which encompasses a policy statement and a five-year strategy, as well as information about funding schemes, resources, and writers'

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[7] Some of these reports were collected by the author during research for the Saison Foundation chapter (Woddis 1997).

organisations. The policy statement affirms the importance of new writing in "helping to ensure that Theatre remains a living and vibrant art form"; it is "the equivalent of research and development in industry." The document also puts forward a wide-ranging and detailed set of aims, including "increas[ing] the amount, diversity, and quality of new writing", "providing more training opportunities for writers" and offering more funding for new writing (although it goes on to refer to the funds it has available itself as "modest" (p.6)). It advocates developing links with writers' organisations, and reflects many of the recurring debates among those working in this field. The strategy ends with some very practical plans of action for the following year, including the production of a directory of theatre writing opportunities, policy agreements on new writing with the theatre companies funded by the Board, support for a writer's group in the region, and press campaigns to promote new playwriting.

In contrast, the theatre policy statement of South East Arts at that time comprised simply a short introduction briefly describing the position of theatre in the region and setting out the Board's priorities, including a commitment to "new and interesting work of high quality", and an outline of its three new funding schemes (SEA 1996).

In terms of the *content* of the Regional Arts Boards' policies, a snapshot of the RABs in one year (Woddis, 1997) indicates that they all, even if on only a rudimentary basis, had policies for new writing for the theatre. All the RABs gave their support to new writing through their funding of theatre companies who themselves presented new work as part or all of their programming, and encouragement was also given to companies to increase the level of their involvement in new work. In addition, RABs had their own schemes to support

new writing for the theatre, which included funds for commissions and productions, script-reading services, and dramaturgical support.

Thus, at that time, three Arts Boards had commission funds, which enabled regional companies to apply for a grant to commission a new play; and two provided funds for the production of new work (with one of these being specifically for plays by writers from ethnic minority communities). Two of the Boards ran a script-reading service through which playwrights living in the region could submit their scripts for professional appraisal, and receive development help or, if the work was of sufficient quality, advice as to how they might get their play performed. Southern Arts also gave funds for developing audiences for new work and supported a theatre writing festival for young people; while South West Arts funded a literary manager for a consortium of six regional theatre companies.

Collaboration with local playwrights' groups and theatre companies was a feature of a number of the RABs' work on new writing, exemplifying aspects of developments in governance, as discussed in Chapter 3. For example, the reports to writers submitting plays to East Midlands Arts' script-reading service, *Write In*, were also sent to all the theatre companies operating in the region, for them to make use of; while several Boards supported local and regional playwrights' organisations with advice or grant-aid to enable them to carry out functions that the RABs wished to see taking place.

However, and at first sight somewhat surprisingly, my research found that there was an element of reluctance by some of the regional arts funding bodies to attribute any positive impact to their policies. One reason for this reticence is that

the scale of many of the activities was so small as to make it difficult to tell whether their impact was of any significance in the overall statistics. For example, when asked about the effect of their commission scheme, Stagewrite, on the production of new plays in the West Midlands, the RAB's Drama Officer found it difficult to assert any specific impact on the level of new playwriting in the region with certainty, because the numbers receiving Stagewrite funding were so small (Woddis 1997, p.44). Similarly, the view of the Eastern Arts Board's drama department then was that they were able to make available such a limited amount of money for their Commission Fund that the impact was inevitably not very great (ibid.). Some of the RABs also admitted to difficulty in assessing the success of their strategy because milestones were not set against which progress could be monitored, or because they had not gathered sufficient information about the situation before the introduction of their schemes to make comparison possible (Woddis, pp.44-45).

Nevertheless, the RABs continued to provide a range of support for the development of new theatre writing; and these have benefited at least some of the writers, theatre companies, and writers' organisations in the regions. But at the same time both the scope and scale of these policies have – like their national counterparts – been the subject of economic pressures and of criticism. With regard to the economic pressures, RAB schemes have been curtailed, sometimes drastically, as a result of funding cutbacks.

The wide range of regional funding arrangements was one of the reasons given for the need for major re-organisation of the Arts Council in 2002-3, which ended the independent existence of the RABs. Under the new structure there is no longer the variation in funding schemes among regions: instead there is a very

much reduced number of different national funding awards, which are operated and available in all regions, although it remains to be seen whether new plays and playwrights will benefit from this change. However, there is still scope for the regional offices of the Council to develop their own policies on new writing, and this is already being embarked on (the North West office, for example, commissioned an investigation into the provision and support of new writing in its region for this very purpose (Loretto and Wilson, 2003a)). In this new phase of arts funding and policy, practitioners will have to adapt and develop ways of influencing policy, as they have done in the past.

4.4 Theatre Writing Policies: Local Government

Local councils have become key funders of the arts in England; but this has not always been the case, since cultural provision is not a statutory duty at local government level. From 1948 local councils have been permitted, but not obliged, to spend up to sixpence per household on the arts; and the failure of many councils to do so is noted in early Arts Council annual reports (ACGB 1951, p.34; 1954, p.8), especially their lack of support for local theatres (ACGB 1960, p.27). By the mid-1970s it was being observed that "we are still a long way from raising one-half of [the total possible] amount from local authority sources" (Redcliffe-Maud 1976, p.102). Although the sixpenny limit was removed in the 1972 Local Government Act, the effects of recession and government cuts from the late 1970s meant continuing restraint in local government funding of the arts. As a result of these factors, financial support of the arts has been extremely variable across different local authorities. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1990s

local government expenditure was estimated to represent about fifty per cent of total public spending on the arts (ACE 2000a, p.15).

A more coherent approach to arts and culture by local authorities was stimulated at this time as a result of a number of factors. These included encouragement by national government (for example, in the 1991 Audit Commission report on local authorities and the arts) and partnerships with RAAs and RABs which developed arts officer posts and a range of "arts audits, studies and arts plans" (Bond and Roberts 1998, pp.1-2). From a situation where local government "commitment and approach to cultural policy varies greatly, and is inadequate as a whole" (Kawashima 1997a, p.32), by the late 1990s most local authorities had produced a policy or strategy for the arts. Further impetus was provided by the publication of the DCMS's consultation draft of guidelines for developing local cultural strategies in early 1999 (DCMS, 1999a), followed by the final guidance document in 2000 (DCMS, 2000).

The support given by local government to theatre consists of several strands: the Arts Council lists thirteen ways in which local authorities support the arts in general (ACE 1996b, p.23), and theatre benefits from several of these, especially through direct provision (for example, of theatre buildings) and in grants to theatre companies and theatre projects. Indirect support may come through participation in arts festivals organised or promoted by local councils, and the use of council-run buildings and services.

In terms of the content of local authority cultural policies, these (like national government policies) are often concerned with objectives that are not artform-specific – such as cultural diversity, urban regeneration, raising the profile of the

city nationally and internationally – and are rarely concerned with the content or form of the arts they fund. In the words of the Boyden Report they "tend to fund theatre for added value rather than from a commitment to drama as art" (Peter Boyden 2000b, p.13). Where theatre is mentioned specifically in local cultural policies it may be in terms of a general exhortation for theatre companies to widen access to theatre productions, to work closely with schools, or to strive for high quality. In general, therefore, the arts policies of local authorities affect the activities and capacities of arts organisations by the broader priorities and goals they set, rather than by setting out directions for the artform itself.

However, there are exceptions to this general rule. Some local cultural strategies are more specific about their objectives for theatre (and indeed for other artforms too). For instance, Newcastle's consultation draft, produced in 1999,[8] states that it will "encourage the work of local [...] playwrights [...] through specific events and activities" (p.16) (though this is lost in the subsequent process of Newcastle's collaboration with Gateshead to bid for European Capital of Culture, which resulted in a joint cultural strategy, *Building Bridges* [2001/2]). Coventry's draft strategy (at the time of writing there is not yet a finalised version) states that one of its "ambitions" is to "invest in and support innovative and experimental creative work" (2002, p.12).

The programming and artistic decisions of individual theatre companies can be influenced through the input of council officers and councillors who commonly sit on the management boards of council-funded theatre companies. Clearly it is not possible for them to attend the meetings of all the arts organisations funded

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[8] Newcastle City Council, *A Cultural Strategy for Newcastle City Council (Draft version for Consultation)*, January 1999.

by their council: it is most likely to be the larger companies or those facing particular difficulties or changes who will have regular attendance from a local arts officer or councillor.

There have also been rare occasions when local authorities or individual politicians have taken exception to the artistic content of a particular artist's or company's work. In 1982, for example, councillors on South Yorkshire County Council refused to give support to the production of a Trevor Griffiths play on the grounds that "it was racist in result if not intent [... and] contained pit language".[9] Local councillors also occasionally played a similar role in Regional Arts Associations: a Conservative councillor was the prime mover of the decision in 1977 by North West Arts Association's management council to cut the grant of the theatre company North West Spanner, on the grounds that it was, in the management council's view, "a 'Marxist revolutionary' company" (Itzin 1980, p.293).[10] The closure of the Worcester Swan Theatre in 2002 was the result of the council's criticism of the theatre's whole approach, with the leader taking the view that adequate theatre could be provided by volunteers rather than "costly professionals", and that it was unnecessary to have a producing theatre with outreach programmes and a commitment to new writing.[11]

For the most part, however, the outlook of local authorities seems to be that artistic decisions do not fall within their remit, and their arts policies reflect this approach. This general view is summed up by one of the local arts officers interviewed who stressed that "what we're not going to do is [...] pretend that we

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[9] Theatre Writers' Union Newsletter, September 1982, [p.26].
[10] The RAA's drama panel, however, were in support of the company, the Arts Council also gave its support, and a large number of theatre practitioners (theatre companies, writers' organisations, theatre management associations, and Equity) spoke out too. The decision was reversed.
[11] 'Fighting to Save the Swan', Staging Post, Winter 2002, Issue 19, p.1.

are the artistic directors of those [arts] organisations [...]. That's not our role".[12] So although a local authority might expect arts organisations to help it pursue broad goals such as access, it would not be likely to demand that a theatre, for example, should pursue a particular artistic programme to fit in with the council's objectives.

The next part of this chapter discusses issues concerning theatre writing policies which have been the focus of particular concern among theatre practitioners, and on which they have sought to make an impact. They provide an illustration of the range of policy issues taken up by practitioners, covering immediate concerns about funding as well as artistic matters and questions of repertoire. The following paragraphs also begin to indicate the variety of ways (which will be examined more fully in the following chapters) in which theatre practitioners have intervened in policy debate and development.

4.5 Key Issues in Theatre Writing Policy

The effectiveness of the arts funding system's playwriting policies has been restricted in many cases because the funds available for new writing are on such a small scale, especially at a regional level, and appear to be particularly vulnerable to funding cuts. Criticism has also been levelled by theatre practitioners at perceived limitations in the content and approach of the policies adopted. The activities of playwriting organisations, which are considered in more detail in the succeeding chapters, have therefore focused on both

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[12] Interview by the author, July 1999.

influencing the scope and focus of those policies, and increasing the amount of funding available to support new writing.

The last sections of this chapter therefore consider the financial issues relating to new writing policies, and then go on to investigate some of the significant thematic debates that have emerged. These are the relationship between writer development and play production; the role of studio theatres in developing or limiting new work; and box office risk in relation to new plays.

4.5.1 Financing Theatre Writing

A major component of both the Arts Council's and the Regional Arts Boards' policies on playwriting has been financial. This is partly, of course, because policies cannot often be implemented without some expenditure; but it is also because a large part of those policies are actually about providing funds: commissions, bursaries, production costs, royalties. However, the sums available for new writing have often been limited, and have been particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in grant-aid.

It was both these factors – of grant support being both low and variable – which led to the demands of the Theatre Writers' Union in the 1970s for 'a living wage' (Itzin, p.306-7), and which have caused concern amongst playwrights and theatre companies in the years since. It has been widely recognised both that writers have been remunerated inadequately: "even some of our most internationally respected writers have not profited much by their stage work in England" (Barnard 1991, p.42); and that theatre companies have frequently faced difficulties in financing new plays. Because, historically, arts funders have committed the major part of their funds to revenue support for institutions

(following the Arts Council's early decision to support arts institutions rather than individual artists), the remaining sums available for one-off and un-committed support have been not only relatively small, but also the only flexible part of the budget that can be cut when grant-aid does not rise.

Thus, from 1977/78 to 1985/86, there was a 66% fall (in real terms) in the Arts Council's drama spending within the category of new writing, bursaries and support organisations (ACGB 1986, p.101). In 1993, when the Arts Council's Treasury grant increase was less than the rate of inflation, the Theatre Writing Committee faced an 18% drop in its funding as a result of the Arts Council's decision to prioritise grants to its regular clients. The Committee therefore decided to cease funding writers' workshops and playwrights' organisations, as well as assistance for second productions. [13]

Even more dramatically, the Eastern Arts Board's Commission Fund (shared among music, dance and literature as well as drama) suffered a major reduction from £56,978 in 1994/95 to £1,615 in the following year when severe cuts in the Board's overall grant resulted in it concentrating its funding on protecting its regular clients. In 1996/97 it had risen again to £27,520, but by the next year it had fallen once more, to £16,380. According to the RAB, the scheme was not widely advertised as so few could benefit from it.[14]

Concerns over the small amount and vulnerability of new writing funds had been compounded during the 1980s when the economic stringencies outlined in Chapter 2 impacted on theatre production. During the second half of the decade

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[13] Documents in Archive of North West Playwrights, NWP 2/1/1/2.
[14] Telephone interview by the author, May 1997, during research for Saison Foundation chapter.

new plays as a proportion of the repertoire in subsidised building-based theatres fell from an average of 12 or 13% in the three preceding four-year periods to 7% in the 1986-90 period (Brown and Brannen, p.381). In some regions the proportion dropped even lower, with three regions having only 1%, and one having no new work at all (Barnard 1991, Table 3.) Although comparable figures showing the actual number of productions and performances over the twenty years from 1971 to 1990 are not available, those that do exist suggest that they declined during much of the period. Statistics based on information from thirty theatres show that there were 22% fewer productions in 1984/85 than in 1971/72, and later information from another sample of twenty-six theatres indicates a continuation of that trend (Feist 1996, p.37). It can therefore be concluded that not only was the proportion of new plays declining, but also the number.

As outlined in Chapter 2, a significant shift in political ideology was initiated by the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher. Theatres found themselves operating in a general climate which was hostile to cultural innovation and radicalism. In the context of the funding difficulties of this period, it therefore seemed safer for theatres to concentrate on work which was assured of an audience and which did not frighten off sponsors. Musicals and adaptations of well-known novels in particular increased their share of the theatre repertoire at this time. Musicals rose from 8% of the repertoire at the beginning of the 1980s to 12% by the end of it, while adaptations increased markedly from 5% at the beginning to 20% by the close (Brown and Brannen, p.381). Thus, as new play production was falling, these 'safer' forms of drama were increasing.

Another issue concerning the financing of new theatre writing, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, has been the way in which funds for the production of new plays are allocated. From the 1950s, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, companies could apply for funding specifically to produce a new play. After 1980 this arrangement was altered so that for those theatre companies in receipt of annual subsidy a part of their grant was instead supposed to be dedicated to the production of new writing. However, there was criticism that in actuality theatres were not paying writers at the recommended rates, or that these sums became swallowed up altogether in the general running costs of the theatres and so disappeared as a pool from which new plays could be produced.

The newsletters, minutes, and correspondence of the Theatre Writers' Union (TWU) contain repeated references to their concern that theatres were not using their earmarked sum for new writing, or were not paying a proper rate, and that the Arts Council was not checking whether they did. In 1983 TWU, along with representatives from the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Society of Authors, held a meeting with members of the Arts Council's New Writing Committee and Drama Department officers, at which this matter was discussed, and it was recognised that the system "was not working satisfactorily".[15] This failure was illustrated during TWU's negotiations with the Theatrical Management Association (TMA), when the TMA representatives had to ask for an adjournment in order to study a copy of the Arts Council's funding schemes (lent to them in the meeting by TWU) as they had been "unaware" of the minimum rates contained therein.[16] The matter was raised again at another meeting with the Arts Council, and the New Writing Officer, Mark Everett,

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[15] TWU Newsletter, May 1983, p.1.
[16] TWU internal notes of meeting with TMA, 23rd November 1983.

informed the writers' representatives that the Council would be setting up a new reporting system, and would not give theatres more funds for new plays than they actually spent.[17] Clearly the problem persisted, as a subsequent TWU newsletter refers to the union's "dual approach to the underpayment of playwrights", which involved it taking up individual cases where playwrights had been paid below the recommended level, while at the same time "pressing the Arts Council to police [...] properly".[18]

It was "anger" over the Council's approach to new writing which was a significant cause of "one of the most serious revolts in [the Arts Council's] history", when in 1985 members of the drama panel resigned in protest and theatre directors held a press conference to express their lack of confidence in the Council after the publication of *The Glory of the Garden.*[19] "Alarm throughout the theatre world" was noted as a result of the fall in the number of new plays being presented overall, and because the Arts Council's policy was resulting in "the responsibility for new writing being carried by at most a dozen theatres".[20]

This matter continued to be of concern in the 1990s, even though, in his three-year proposals for drama from 1994 to 1997, the Arts Council's Drama Director Ian Brown refers to the "earmarked sum" contained in every regional theatre's grant "which is intended for the commissioning of new works" [p.6].[21] Despite this assertion, the precariousness of new writing support within theatres was confirmed by theatre workers like the literary manager of West Yorkshire Playhouse who stated that "the first things to go when money is tight are

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[17] TWU News Sheet, [December 1983], [p.3].
[18] TWU News Sheet 5, [April 1984], [p.11].
[19] Nicholas de Jongh, 'Theatre revolt over 'political' Arts Council', *Guardian*, 1st March 1985.
[20] Robert Hewison, 'Case of the disappearing playwrights', *Sunday Times*, 26th May 1985, p 41.
[21] Ian Brown, *Drama: Three-Year Plan 1994-97*, August 1993 (ACGB).

provisions for unsolicited work and funds for commissioning new plays".[22] South West Arts also pointed out that "No guidance was given as to the level of new work that was expected, and the requirements on those companies – if in fact they existed at all – have never been clarified" (SWA 1997, paragraph 21).

Playwrights' organisations were also worried. Minutes of a Theatre Writers' Union meeting in March 1994 refer to a meeting with the Arts Council's Theatre Writing Officer at which "the subject of how funds for new writing to theatre were monitored was discussed". In November that year, eighty-six playwrights signed a letter to the *Guardian* urging the subsidised theatres to produce more new plays because of the "drastic decrease in the number of new plays being produced [...] and also in the proportion of their budget each theatre spends on new plays".[23]

On occasions like this the response of the writers' organisations indicates a concern that, while commensurate with, nevertheless goes beyond, their own particular interests to a wider public benefit. Thus, the Theatre Writers' Union reacted to the Arts Council's 18% cut to the Theatre Writing budget in 1993 by pointing out that "this is not consonant with any medium or long-term strategy for theatre in Britain".[24] The concerns of the *Guardian* signatories were echoed the next day by Michael Billington, the paper's theatre critic, who referred to "the crisis currently affecting British theatre: the sense that it is slowly turning into a dusty museum [...]".[25]

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[22] Interview in TWU Newsletter, Summer 1994, p.7.

[23] 'Playwrights demand more time in the theatres for new work', *Guardian*, 21st November 1994, p.21. (Some references to this letter, including Michael Billington's article in response, speak of 87 playwrights, but there are definitely 86 signatories as it was printed in the *Guardian* on 21st Nov. 1994.)

[24] TWU Executive Committee minutes, 6th March 1993.

[25] Michael Billington, '87 deadly sins', *Guardian*, 22nd November 1994,G2, p.5.

One of the over-riding concerns of playwrights thus became the need to increase the numbers of new plays being performed, and to provide support to writers in the absence of a theatre environment in which new plays could flourish. On the one hand this led to pressure on both funders and theatres to focus more on new playwriting, and to demands for better funding; while at the same time it increased playwrights' realisation that they needed to organise themselves to achieve these aspirations. The formation and activities of writers' groups are examined in more detail in the next chapter.

4.5.2 New Writers or New Writing?

One issue which has been the focus of considerable debate is that of development versus production, or what has also been framed as the question: new writers or new writing? The point debated is whether resources should be put into developing the skills of writers, regardless of whether their work is subsequently produced, or whether the focus should be on ensuring that plays reach production by theatre companies.

Many of the playwrights' associations have provided developmental support to playwrights, including script-reading services, mentoring, writers' groups, workshops, and rehearsed readings. For some of the groups, development has not only been fundamental to their work but they have also emphasised the importance of separating it from production, of removing the pressure of a production date: "The fact is that in the end the workshop cannot function merely as a proving ground for new work, with an emphasis on bringing every play to full production. It must maintain the exploratory role" (Brown 1984, [p.2].

The reasons for this are to benefit the development of both playwrights and theatres. The former are given the opportunity to see their ideas put 'on their feet', with professional actors and directors bringing their expertise to bear on the script. In this way writers learn more about the craft of playwriting, as well as receiving insight into improving the particular play under development. For theatre companies it is seen as being "a valuable means through which the theatre can carry out the research and development that will allow it to maintain itself and to grow" (Brown, 1984 [p.2]). This view is shared by Chris O'Connell, the Artistic Director of the new-writing company, Theatre Absolute, who sees the establishment of the Writing House in Coventry (referred to above, section 4.2) as giving "space to say 'what if', to have the space to fail and to try things and to experiment".[26]

Nevertheless, ventures like the Writing House do still have a commitment to produce; so even though they may develop work with a writer over a long period, eventually a play will be presented on stage. It is important to note, too, that although the playwrights' organisations have argued for the importance of development in its own right, they are also committed to making a link between this and production. Groups like Stagecoach!, the West Midlands playwrights' association, and North West Playwrights often count their successes in terms of the number of writers who have been commissioned by theatre companies after having been supported by their development activities. In its report of its first set of workshops, Stagecoach! described its "foremost" aim as "seeing our plays programmed into our region's theatre buildings".[27] But the developmental work

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[26] Interview by the author, October 1999.

[27] Stagecoach! Organising Committee, *Report of Stagecoach! 1992*, June 1992, p.16 (West Midlands Theatre Writers' Union).

of the playwrights' organisations has not always led to productions. The reasons for this have been a matter of debate.

Some of the playwrights' associations suggest that there is not enough interest from theatres and theatre companies in taking up playwrights' work, even when it has been presented for view to the theatres (for example, in rehearsed readings). When North West Playwrights was first established, in the early 1980s, one in three of the plays which it developed were being produced. However, by 1999, the Director of North West Playwrights was expressing concern that very few of the plays workshopped in the intervening years had been produced by theatres in the region. She felt that this might be due to the theatres feeling a lack of 'ownership' of the plays, because they were developed by the playwrights' association rather than by the theatres themselves.[28]

Some Regional Arts Boards voice concern about the balance between development and production. South West Arts for example, while stating its commitment to supporting writers' groups and providing training and development for playwrights, nevertheless warned that "developmental work with writers of promise should not be seen as an end in itself. There is no purposeful movement unless it is towards a goal. And that goal is full professional production" (SWA [1998], p.6). It has therefore been suggested that the lack of productions is a result of playwrights' associations concentrating too much on playwright development, rather than on securing productions of their plays. This view was put forward by the Drama Officer of Yorkshire and Humberside Arts,[29] who expressed the opinion that Yorkshire Playwrights had

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[28] Conversation with the author, January 1999.
[29] Yorkshire and Humberside Arts was renamed as Yorkshire Arts in early 1999.

focused on developing the craft of playwriting, but not on getting plays produced.[30] As a result of this concern, their grant was halved by the RAB in 1998, and a process of consultation initiated to produce a policy which would benefit both writers *and* theatres. The Drama Officer referred to the need to "make a leap from script to production".[31]

A further aspect of the debate is the theatres' assessment of the quality of plays on offer through the development work of the playwrights' groups. There has been a feeling among some theatres that the support activities undertaken by playwrights' organisations has (inevitably perhaps) become focused on new and developing writers, with the effect that the standard of work produced is less likely to be sufficiently high for a professional theatre company to consider presenting.

This was the case in Yorkshire in the late 1990s when Yorkshire Playwrights experienced problems with its script-reading service: ninety per cent of the 120 to 150 plays it received each year were of poor quality, and the most experienced writers were having their scripts read directly by the theatres rather than submitting them to the playwrights' organisation. In 1998 Yorkshire Playwrights therefore initiated a playwriting competition, called 'Mainstage', in an attempt to tackle this problem. Five play proposals would be selected to receive £500 each, to enable the writers to complete a first draft of a play for full production on the main stage of a regional theatre. Only writers who had already had at least two professional productions were eligible to submit scripts. Even with this entry qualification the 'Mainstage' scheme failed to find any plays of sufficiently high

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[30] Telephone interview by the author, December 1998.
[31] Ibid.

quality for the theatres to consider. After lengthy consideration, the three judges (directors of major building-based theatres in Yorkshire) reported that they were unable to make an award to any of the submissions as none of them "fired us with sufficient collective enthusiasm [...]. We were ultimately unconvinced that any of these ideas, in the form in which they were expressed, had a genuinely viable future as a play on the main stages of any of the region's theatres."[32]

As a result of these concerns, there has been a withdrawal of support for playwriting organisations by some of the funders, and a move to create new forms of new writing organisations. A paper produced in 1999 by the Arts Council Drama Department on its theatre writing strategy included an appendix that specifically focused on the question of development work, and asserted that "priority should be given to theatres and companies that produce plays, rather than workshopping or umbrella groups and other non-producing agencies."[33] At a regional level, West Midlands RAB proposed ending financial support for Stagecoach! in 2001, with one of the reasons being a wish to bring development and production closer together by deploying funds differently. [34]

However, another aspect of the situation which needs to be considered is the wider political and economic context in which these developments have taken place. As already discussed, the 1980s and early 1990s saw sharp pressures being exerted on British theatre for both economic and ideological reasons, and this brought a steep decline in the proportion of new plays in the repertoire. This in

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[32] *Newscript* (newsletter of Yorkshire Playwrights) November 1998, p.[2].

[33] [Drama Panel Working Party], *Background to the Theatre Writing Strategy*, 1999, p.19. (ACE, unpublished paper)

[34] In fact, after pressure from the region's theatre community, West Midlands Arts (WMA) continued Stagecoach!'s funding while it reorganised itself. The new organisation, Script, was then also funded by WMA.

turn affected the playwrights' organisations – a fact recognised by writer Graeme Rigby in his report on playwriting in the northern region. He makes the point that the Northern Playwrights' Society had actually "resisted support for playreadings [...] believing it more important to channel resources into commissions", but as openings for productions declined, more development projects were set up. He also points out that at this stage there was support from arts funders for such activities (Rigby, [1995], pp.7-8).

While the arts funders gradually questioned this route of development, there remains a conviction among playwrights' organisations that this kind of developmental work is still needed, and there is evidence that these services continue to be in demand.[35] It is also significant that a number of theatres now provide these services (cf. Appendix 3); and, as indicated earlier, some RABs have also provided development services themselves, such as script-reading schemes and script 'surgeries'.

Thus the issue should perhaps be framed in a different way: rather than being development *versus* production, it is a question of how the two can be linked, while at the same time maintaining a role for the development of writers and their writing without the pressure of production. The relationship between development and production continues to be a matter for debate in which practitioners play an important role; and illustrates the concept of long-term policy change, involving a wide range of policy actors, that was brought forward in Chapter 1. Policy is not simply a matter of a single decision which is then

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[35] For instance, the newsletter of Stagecoach! states that "a constant theme [among members] is the desire for more regular events such as workshops and script readings". *Staging Post* Issue 5, New Year 1999, p.2.

implemented, but evolves over time, with all the participants contributing towards its development in a dynamic process of activity and change.

4.5.3 New Plays and Studio Spaces

A recurrent matter of policy discussion focuses on the theatre spaces in which new writing is presented. As indicated earlier, new plays have frequently been performed only in studio theatres. The reasons for concern are both because these small spaces can be seen as less significant than main stages and large auditoriums, and because writing for the small-scale is regarded by theatre practitioners as limiting in terms of the content and form of plays themselves. It is felt that it is more difficult (though not impossible) to write plays that deal with large social issues if they are performed in small physical spaces – and therefore, usually, also with a small cast. In the opinion of playwright David Hare, the "studio theatre syndrome [...] encourages playwrights to think small and write unambitiously"[36] – a view repeated by other practitioners during my research, including literary managers and theatre directors.[37] Understandably, writers also want to reach larger audiences than the one or two hundred that are common to studio theatres.

Studio theatres began to be built in greater numbers in the 1970s, as a response to the alternative theatre movement which sought to present its plays in non-theatrical venues and to break away from the conventional architecture of theatres. The experimental companies worked in such spaces primarily out of political conviction, seeking new audiences and experimenting with theatrical

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[36] Michael Coveney, 'Mini-Interview', *Observer*, 9th February 1997.
[37] Interviews by the author, May 1999, and contributions at conferences: *Mentors or Censors* & *Writing Onwards* (cf. Appendix 1).

forms (although limited finances did also have a bearing on their choice of venues). However, the established theatres' move to build studios was not always driven by the same impetus, and these smaller spaces were usually "defined simply in relation to a 'main house' " (Chambers 1980, p.9).

As noted earlier, the Arts Council's policy document, *The Glory of the Garden* (1984), linked together studios and new plays in its suggestion that theatres should look "beyond the staging of productions in their own main houses" and increase work in their studios "with particular emphasis on new writing" (p.16). The trend towards concentrating this work in studio theatres was regarded in the Cork report (1986) as having undermined the development of new writing, leading to the "risk [of] undervaluing such work and encouraging further the concentration of writers on small scale work" (p.27). In 1993 the playwright David Edgar, speaking to the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), expressed serious concern at the fact that new plays were "concentrated in the smaller spaces" (Edgar 1993, p.452); and in the following year one of the demands of the eighty-six playwrights who wrote to the Guardian was that the majority of new plays should be produced on theatres' main stages.

These concerns are borne out by figures produced by the Arts Council, which show that by 1994/95 new work made up 38.2% of studio productions as compared to only 18.8% of those in the main houses. They are also echoed by theatre reviewers such as Michael Billington, who in 1996 was writing that "All I hope is that the dramatists escape from the confines of studio spaces and go on to

write plays for bigger stages. [...] What we need are more plays capable of addressing large congregations".[38]

The issue was still of sufficient concern in 2001 that a conference on new writing held by Stagecoach! included sessions on "Writing for Big Stages", and produced recommendations aimed at increasing the number of new plays on main stages and developing playwrights' skills to enable them to write for this scale (Stagecoach!, 2001).

It should be noted that the worries about new writing taking place in studios and other small-scale spaces does not mean that playwrights do not wish to write for these spaces at all. In fact writers do choose to do work for small venues. Not only can it be less daunting for new playwrights, but for all writers another important aspect of the small size of a studio is the intimacy it creates. It allows a close proximity with the audience, creating a "different relationship [...] between the audience and the performance" (Chambers 1980, p.9) which can advantageously affect both the content and form of plays. Likewise, some theatre companies express very positive reasons for wanting to develop new work in such venues. On its re-opening in 1998 the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, for example, (while also presenting new plays on its main stage) stressed the value of its studio as "an exciting new space" that was flexible enough to allow for experimentation and the discovery of new writers.[39] Similarly, when the Royal Court Theatre was refurbished in the 1990s the

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[38] Michael Billington, 'Theatre is alive – official', *Guardian*, 28th December 1996, p.7.

[39] *New Play Policy* – http://www.royalexchange.co.uk/new_writing/intro.htm (accessed 6th January 1999).

decision was taken not to increase its seating capacity "since the bigger you go, the less you can sustain risk and daring in the programming".[40]

The point that playwrights have been making is that they do not want to be limited *only* to the small-scale, and this concern has fuelled their attempts to bring about a shift in the operations of theatres in order to create more opportunities for new writing on their main stages.

4.5.4 New Plays and Box Office Risk

Another issue, closely linked to the tendency to place new plays in studio theatres, is the box office return expected on new work. New plays have been seen by both theatre companies and funders as less likely to draw large audiences than other categories of drama such as adaptations and musicals. Arts Council reports refer to the risk involved in putting on new plays: for example, *The Glory of the Garden* states that "new writing is often less popular than the traditional repertoire" (ACGB 1984, p.27); though they also defend the "degree of wastage" involved, arguing that "it is unnecessary to apologise for any failures of experiment and innovation when we owe to their past successes much that is standard in today's theatre" (ACGB 1980a, p.14).

Playwrights' organisations have persistently challenged the view that new work inevitably involves risk. In fact, groups like North West Playwrights Workshops were set up partly with the aim of countering the perception that the programming of new plays is a risky business; while the Theatre Writers' Union repeatedly argued against the idea, including in their two major reports,

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[40] Paul Taylor, 'A last look back (in awe, not anger), *Independent*, 2nd October 1996, Section 2, p.9.

Playwrights: An Endangered Species? (1982) and *Playwrights: A Species Still Endangered?* (1987).

In their response to the Arts Council's 'Green Paper' on Drama Policy in 1995, the Theatre Writers' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain brought together a range of statistical material to back up their argument that new writing is not "an inevitable box office disaster".[41] The paper suggests that if musicals and Christmas shows are excluded, new work was actually on a par with the rest of the repertoire in the first half of the 1980s in terms of its average attendance, and in one of these years new plays were ahead (61% attendance compared to 58% in the rest of the repertoire). New work did less well in the second half of the decade, falling behind by twelve per cent in 1988/89; but in the early 1990s it climbed again. Looking particularly at the National Theatre, the paper gives figures of 92 and 98 per cent attendance for two of the three new plays in 1984/85, compared to an average of 85 per cent, and paints a vivid picture of the situation in another year, 1992: "Tony Kushner outsold Chekhov in the Cottesloe, Alan Bennett outpaced Eugene O'Neill, J.B.Priestley and Moliere in the Lyttleton, and David Hare's trilogy outperformed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [...] and later *The Seagull* (starring Judi Dench)" [p.4].

What *is* the case, however, is that in a choice between new writing and out-of-copyright plays (with all other things, such as cast size and set changes, being equal), new works are more expensive for theatres as they have to pay the initial commission fee to the writer, as well as development costs such as longer rehearsals, literary management, and additional marketing. It is for this reason

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[41] Theatre Writers' Union and Writers' Guild of Great Britain, *The New Writing Fund: A proposal to the Arts Council of England*, 1995.

that the Theatre Writers' Union, supported by the Writers' Guild, developed the idea of a 'dead writers' levy', which was the focus of the paper, *The New Writing Fund*, presented to the Arts Council in 1995. The aim of the levy was to counter the financial advantage to theatres in putting on plays by out-of-copyright authors. The proposal was therefore to create a 'level playing field' in which theatres would pay ten per cent royalties on *all* plays they produced. The royalties on out-of-copyright plays would be paid into an Arts Council-managed fund which in turn would be distributed to theatre companies for paying commission fees for new plays and the additional development expenses involved. Thus the writers' organisations attempted to offer a serious solution to this aspect of financial risk in putting on new plays.

The playwrights' groups also argue that the more new work is presented, the more successful it is, with box office attendance figures tending to mirror the amount of new work being produced. This view is supported by other theatre practitioners: Peter Hall, for instance, asserts that "the more new plays there are, the more confidence there is in doing new plays".[42] When Birmingham Repertory Theatre embarked, in 1998, on a programme of new plays in its studio theatre, it averaged only twenty per cent capacity in its first season, but by the second year was achieving an audience of forty-five per cent, with some of its plays "outstripping their box-office targets by a mile".[43]

In its *Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System* (1996c) the Arts Council of England states that new plays "are perceived as a great financial risk

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[42] Peter Hall interviewed by Chris Barlas in Gambit, 1976, Vol..7, No.28, p.25.
[43] Ben Payne, Literary Manager, 'Opening The Door', in Birmingham Repertory Theatre, *Open The Door*, Issue 1, Summer 2001.

to producing companies" (p.16). Although it goes on to suggest that "the success of new plays in recent years has demonstrated that these can be false perceptions" (ibid.), the fact that it was felt necessary to make the point is telling, indicating that this perception has continued to be prevalent, and therefore still a matter requiring debate and information. While figures such as those from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre show that new writing *can* be a financial risk; equally they illustrate that a commitment to regular programming of new plays can overcome this risk.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the development, since the 1940s, of those policies of the arts funders which have a bearing on new playwriting (and which in turn also govern the policies of subsidised theatre companies). It has also given an account of the key criticisms and concerns expressed by theatre practitioners. These concerns arise not only from what is contained in those policies but also from what is missing. They focus on a wide range of issues affecting playwrights, theatres, and the artform itself, relating both to the terms, conditions, and circumstances of theatre practitioners' professional work, and to the wider significance of new writing for the future of theatre. In particular, they illustrate the complexity of policy for new playwriting, and the number of fronts on which both practitioners and funders have had to engage. They also reflect the immediacy of the issues in that they directly affect the livelihood of writers, adding an urgency to many of the actions taken by the playwrights' organisations, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Given these concerns, theatre companies and playwrights' organisations have therefore sought to extend or alter the scope and focus of playwriting policies. At the same time though, as we have seen, there have also been points of concord between funders and practitioners. Moreover, even while arguing for the improvement of policies and funding schemes, practitioners have defended them when they have been threatened with cutbacks.

Already it is clear that concepts drawn from public policy studies, discussed in Chapter 1, are evident in the area of new playwriting policy. We have seen that in several instances practitioners have been brought into policy consultations; but also, where they have been left out by the arts funding system, they have taken action themselves to have an influence on policy. Thus, the idea that public policy involves interaction amongst a range of actors holds true here; and at the same time there is evidence that theatre practitioners have attempted to increase their resources of knowledge and expertise (through their research and writing development activities, and collaboration with others in the field) to influence policy through their own initiatives. This chapter has also shown that some of the developments in democratisation and governance, discussed in Chapter 3, are reflected in certain consultations and instances of policy implementation in the area of playwriting policy.

This account has thus begun to show the engagement of theatre practitioners in the processes of policy-making and implementation, in the active and self-directed capacity discussed in Chapter 1, and as voluntary associations involved in the civil sphere of a democratic society. The next chapter focuses in more detail on the history of the playwrights' organisations, the work of theatre companies involved in new writing, and the issues of contention between writers

and theatres, in order to examine more closely the extent to which practitioners are able to affect both their involvement in policy activity and their influence on policy development, and to engage as active participants in civil society.

Chapter 5

Playwrights and Theatre Companies: New Playwriting Practice and Policy

This chapter focuses on the playwrights' organisations and theatre companies: both centrally involved in the practice and policy of new theatre writing in England. As outlined in the previous chapter, they are the principal bodies that engage with the arts funders over new playwriting policies, and they also have significant connections with each other, in which they both collaborate and contend. The following pages provide an illustration of the ways in which practitioners have organised themselves, developing their resources to have greater influence and to make themselves into 'insider' groups with 'privileged access'. In this way they can also be categorised as examples of the voluntary associations that make up civil society and participate in democratic debate and activity.

The chapter firstly gives a historical account of playwrights' groups in England,[1] and then discusses key aspects of their role and modes of organisation. Drawing on unpublished primary material it offers a more detailed and comprehensive history of the playwrights' self-help movement than has been brought together hitherto. Following this, a section considers the work of English theatre companies involved in new playwriting. The chapter concludes by examining key issues of contention in the relations between writers and theatres.

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[1] For a brief account of international influences and links among playwrights' organisations, cf. Appendix 2.

5.1 Creating Their Own Stage: the Playwrights' Self-help Movement

One of the significant features of theatre writing in the second half of the twentieth century is the extent to which playwrights have organised themselves to both represent their interests and monitor the development of new work. This fact makes the policy area of new theatre writing a particularly fruitful one in which to consider the involvement of practitioners in policy-making. The following section offers a description and brief history of the key playwrights' organisations in England, which include national, regional, and local groups, embracing both established playwrights and those making their first steps in theatre writing. It therefore provides a background for the more detailed discussion of their role in policy-making in the next chapter.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the late 1960s and the 1970s saw an upsurge in experimental activity in the cultural field, which mirrored a wider burst of questioning and radical action in society as a whole. As indicated in that earlier chapter, these cultural developments were manifest in the theatre sector, producing dozens of new, experimental theatre companies. As well as searching for innovations in artistic form and content, these companies also sought to challenge the status quo in terms of organisation: they both questioned the existing ways of administering and funding the arts, and set up their own organisations and forums such as The Association of Community Theatres (TACT) and the Independent Theatre Council (ITC) – both formed in 1974 (Itzin, 1980). At the same time, playwrights themselves also began to establish new organisations at both national and regional level to represent their own interests, to support each other's work, and to advocate more generally for new writing in the theatre.

5.1.1 Northern Playwrights' Society: the First English Playwrights' Organisation

The first of the playwrights' organisations to be set up in England was the Northern Playwrights Society (NPS), which was founded in January 1975 by two playwrights working in the region. One of them, Cecil Taylor, had been involved in the Scottish Society of Playwrights (SSP), which had been formed in 1973; and he brought his experience of that organisation when he moved to northern England. He also brought with him the theatre writing contract that had been developed by the Scottish Society, which was then re-drafted by NPS. The importance of having a model agreement is emphasised by a later active member of Northern Playwrights: "In 1974 [in England] there was no standard theatre writing contract [...]. People were being commissioned for a couple of hundred quid to write a play in those days, and there was nothing on paper, no rights sorted out".[2]

By the end of its first year, NPS had twenty-two members and was holding regular meetings and organising a range of projects, many in collaboration with other organisations and institutions in the region. A report of its first year of work[3] is impressive for the number of links and partnerships it had already established. These included play readings and reduced-price ticket arrangements in association with regional theatres; a script copying and cataloguing scheme with Newcastle library; and funding support for playwrights through the Northern Arts Association. Active links were also maintained with the Scottish Society of Playwrights. The report refers to the "enthusiasm" and "energy" engendered by the existence and activities of NPS; and provides evidence of the

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[2] Author's interview with Graeme Rigby, March 1999.

[3] 'Northern Playwrights' Society – The First Year'(1976): unattributed article reprinted in *Theatre Writers' Union Newsletter*, August 1982, [p.6].

standing of the Society, even at this early stage, in the fact that theatres were contacting it "directly with offers for commissions from its members." It is an early indication of the interactive way in which the playwriting policy area is constructed, and in which participants seek to increase their resources and status.

NPS was established as a membership organisation, to which anyone who defined themselves as a playwright (or aspiring playwright) could belong, paying a membership fee and having voting rights on all issues at the monthly meetings of the Society. It was "a playwrights' organisation run by playwrights".[4] Conceived as a body that would provide writers with help and support, it offered a forum in which writers could meet theatre directors, and acted as a trade union in matters of representation and negotiation. In its early years the Society became a hub for theatre writing in the region: "It was a really great centre. If you were interested in playwriting you were a fool not to get involved in Northern Playwrights, because that's where the opportunities were."[5]

The Northern Playwrights' Society was run voluntarily by its members, with a small honorarium being given to a co-ordinator who was drawn from the membership. Later, as the Society grew and took on more work, this form of organisation and administration would present some problems, eventually bringing about radical changes. This is discussed further later in this chapter.

In the meantime, in 1979, NPS took on the administration of a new playwriting scheme funded by the Northern Regional Arts Association. This had come out of an approach to the RAA by theatre companies who were concerned that there

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[4] Author's interview with Pete Mortimer, NPS Secretary, March 1999.
[5] Author's interview with Graeme Rigby, March 1999.

was insufficient support for new writing in the region. The scheme enabled regional companies to apply for funds to commission a writer from the region (up to fifty per cent of a commission fee), with the decisions being made by a committee consisting of Northern Arts and Northern Playwrights members. In addition to this, NPS also created its own bursaries for writers, started a regular newsletter, developed a script photocopying scheme in collaboration with regional theatre companies, and established a script-reading service (Rigby, [1995]).

By the 1990s the administration of the playwriting funds was becoming too great a burden for the resources of NPS, even with the appointment of a part-time New Writing officer, so the society and the RAB created a new joint body – the New Playwriting Panel – to run the funding programme. Shortly after its inception the New Playwriting Panel was asked by Northern Arts to develop a regional theatre writing policy. At the same time thinking was developing in the region for a different kind of agency, which would be more strategic, would offer a range of projects, and would be concerned with all forms of creative writing. The outcome of the Panel's report, written by Graeme Rigby, the co-ordinator of the Panel (Rigby [1995]), was the establishment in 1995 of New Writing North. As will be seen in the next chapter, these developments had an impact on NPS and the society eventually dissolved in 2000, although it continued until then to provide support for new playwrights in the region.

5.1.2 Playwrights' Organisations at the National Level

a) The Theatre Writers' Union

Less than a year after the foundation of the Northern Playwrights Society, a national organisation for playwrights – the Theatre Writers' Union (TWU) – was established. Set up originally as the Theatre Writers' Group (TWG) in the autumn of 1975, in rapid response to proposed severe cuts in the Arts Council's new writing schemes, it immediately began to campaign against these reductions and for better conditions for playwrights.

TWG/TWU argued that playwrights were the "poor relations" of the theatre world.[6] The method of remuneration applied to them, whereby they were paid a royalty based on box office earnings, was one which had operated in the commercial theatre sector but was not appropriate for the subsidised sector, where box office income was only part of the equation. This was particularly the case in the smaller theatres where subsidy formed a large part of income, as the subsidy element of theatre income was not included in the calculations for playwrights' royalties. Indeed, the Arts Council itself effectively confirmed that playwrights were poorly remunerated, referring, for example, to "the often very low Royalties that may be paid on subsidised productions".[7]

Furthermore, writers in the subsidised theatre were in an anomalous position in their reliance on box office results for their payment, "the only artist in the theatre whose income depends solely on a percentage of box office takings"

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[6] Theatre Writers' Group press release, 1st January 1976.
[7] Arts Council of Great Britain, *New Writing in the Theatre*, 1976 and subsequent editions (brochure of ACGB new writing schemes).

(ACGB 1977, p.18): all other theatre workers were paid a fixed fee or wage, regardless of the number of tickets sold. As TWU put it, "In the commercial theatre everyone taking part is involved in a gamble. In subsidised theatre only the writer is the gambler – and s/he usually loses."[8] The playwrights' view was that they should be paid at a rate equivalent to other theatre workers, with commissions being calculated on the basis of a weekly wage over the average period taken to write a play. This proposition was reflected in its slogan of 'A Living Wage for Theatre-Writers!'[9]

In these early campaigns TWG/TWU also sought more openness and information from the Arts Council about its playwriting schemes and decision-making processes; and demanded that the Council should recognise and communicate with writers' organisations. Over the next year the Arts Council responded to some of these demands, increasing the sums it gave as commissions and bursaries, agreeing to consult with the playwrights about its playwriting schemes, and meeting, to some extent at least, the group's requests for greater transparency and the simple transmission of information. A TWG press release of the time noted the sometimes astonishing effect of such disclosure: "There have been [...] immediate practical gains: one writer, for instance, discovered in an Arts Council report that he'd been granted a payment he'd never received."[10]

By 1976 the original thirty-two members of the TWG had grown to 150, in what was now the Theatre Writers' Union. The Northern Playwrights' philosophy of members' participatory democracy was replicated at a national level in TWU.

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[8] Sue Ashby and Norman Leach (compilers), *Theatre Writers' Union Guide for New Members*, [1986], p1.
[9] *Theatre-Writers Group*: document produced after first meeting, October 1975.
[10] Theatre Writers' Group press release, 1st January 1976.

From its inception, the union operated a structure wherein members could attend all meetings, with voting rights; although it also had an elected delegate committee to deal with matters in-between members' meetings. Its funding was provided primarily through its members' subscriptions.

Although the initial impetus for the establishment of TWU arose from the actions of the Arts Council, its members realised that it needed to widen its remit and address theatre managements too: "Pressure on the subsidising body was vital; but there was a severe limit to what the Arts Council could do. The very fact of the appalling situation of writers proved that the good offices of a Government body were not enough."[11] Writers' concerns were not only about money, but also about "control over their work in rehearsal and performance".[12] In 1977 TWU therefore set out to negotiate for a standard contract for writers working in theatres.

The campaign focused on the newly opening National Theatre, "a benchmark for the whole of the theatre",[13] and the other members of the Theatres' National Committee (TNC): the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Court Theatre. While TWU drew up a detailed draft contract, playwrights refused to sign individual contracts with the National Theatre. Initially there was friction with the longer-established Writers' Guild of Great Britain, which claimed sole rights to represent theatre writers; but as it transpired that TWU contained the larger membership of playwrights and the Royal Court Theatre was willing to

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[11] *The Case for the Theatre Writers' Union*, [n.d].
[12] Ibid.
[13] David Edgar, *Of age at last: Happy birthday to TWU*, draft for TWU Newsletter, [October 1996].

recognise it, the two organisations eventually negotiated jointly. After a long and complex process of negotiations the TNC agreed to the standard contract in 1979.

In the following years a similar contract agreement was reached with the Theatrical Management Association, representing regional repertory theatres, and another with the Independent Theatre Council, which represents small-scale theatre companies. (These contracts covered all writers, even if not a member of any of the writers' organisations.) Catherine Itzin, commenting on these agreements in her survey of theatre developments in this period, notes that "for the first time in the history of the country, playwrights would by right receive a living wage for their work" (Itzin, p.313). These contracts also gave writers a greater voice in the realisation of their work, including influence over casting and choice of director, and payment for attending rehearsals of their plays. The latter right was claimed by TWU as unique to Britain (TWU 1987, p.41).

The emergence of the playwrights' organisations and the need for such bodies was soon acknowledged, at a major conference on new theatre writing, 'Towards a National Playwrights' Conference'.[14] The lack of consultation with playwrights over the production of their own plays, the practical needs of playwrights (for example for script copying), the "horror stories of the unread scripts piling up [...] because there is no budget for reading scripts", and a wish to see more new plays produced, were all pointed to as reasons for writers wishing to set up their own organisations in order to have an influence in the sector (Theatre Quarterly, 1979, pp.65-82).

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[14] The conference was jointly organised at the University of East Anglia in 1978 by the British Associate Centre of the International Theatre Institute and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation with the help of the journal *Theatre Quarterly*.

Throughout its existence, TWU operated on more than one front, and with more than one function. It acted as a conventional trade union by bringing pressure to bear on its members' employers – the theatres – over contractual matters of pay and conditions, but also recognised the importance of targeting the arts funding system as the source both of the theatres' own funding and of the schemes which directly supported playwrights. The union negotiated with theatres' management organisations over terms and conditions for playwrights as a whole, while also providing legal advice and support to individual writers in dispute with particular theatre companies.

At the same time TWU also operated as an advocate for new writing and as a support system for the development of writers and their work. In the first of these roles it carried out research, produced reports such as *Playwrights: An Endangered Species?* (1982, updated in 1987 as *Playwrights: A Species Still Endangered?*), and organised conferences and seminars. A particular focus of this wider campaigning was the idea for the 'dead writers' levy', referred to in the previous chapter. This broader campaigning and advocacy role, including this attempt by TWU through the 'dead writers' levy' to create new policy for the theatre sector as a whole, is discussed in more detail later in the chapter, and in the next.

At the same time, in its role of support for the development of playwrights and their work, TWU published a regular newsletter for its members; and, through its local branches, ran workshops, play-readings, competitions, and festivals to provide development opportunities for writers. These support and development aspects of TWU's purpose and activity were considered central to TWU's operation and identity: an internal report, written when the union was considering

amalgamation with the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, stressed the need for these features to be "preserved and furthered in any amalgamated body".[15]

Although, by its own admission, the union had "its ups and downs"[16] (its internal differences and its setbacks as well as achievements; branches starting up but also closing; falls in membership as well as rises), by the early 1990s TWU had around five hundred members, ranging from writers at the beginning of their careers to some of the most well known playwrights, and constituting, according to its account, "the bulk of theatre writers".[17] In addition to its national organisation it also had a number of local branches, some of which were based on towns or cities, while others had a regional remit.

b) The Writers' Guild of Great Britain

From an early stage in its existence the Theatre Writers' Union did not act alone. In 1958 the Writers' Guild of Great Britain had been established as a trade union for professional film and television writers, and subsequently opened up to novelists and playwrights as well. The purpose of the Guild is to support and represent writers by negotiating with management on their behalf; giving advice on contracts, and other legal and financial matters; and providing a network of contact and information through a newsletter and web-site, and the organisation of workshops and seminars. It has presented its own Annual Awards for writers, and has run special events, such as a theatre showcase in conjunction with the Directors' Guild and the Actors' Centre. It is also involved in developing the training of writers.

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[15] Minutes of Theatre Writers' Union Executive Committee meeting, 2nd December 1995, Appendix 2.
[16] Theatre Writers Union recruitment letter, March 1989.
[17] Theatre Writers Union, *Newsletter*, January-February 1990, p3.

In the late 1990s the Writers' Guild had two thousand members working in a range of writing media. It differed from the TWU not only in its inclusion of writers in a variety of media, but also by virtue of the fact that it admitted only writers who had already been published or produced. Further, it was structured not along the lines of TWU's participatory democracy, but with a representative format of an annually-elected executive committee, and full-time paid staff. Its funding comes from members' subscriptions. It is also formally recognised as a trade union, being affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

c) The Guild & TWU

After an initially problematic relationship with the Writers' Guild, where, as we have seen, the Guild sought to be the sole representative of playwrights in the contract negotiations with the Theatres' National Committee, TWU worked together with the Guild in subsequent years "as partners" in their negotiations with the employers' organisations[18], in discussions with the Arts Council, and on wider campaigns to raise the profile of new writing and writers. Thus, over many years, negotiators from both organisations met together to prepare for meetings with the theatres' management associations; and representatives from the two bodies organised meetings jointly with the Arts Council's Theatre Writing Committee and its Drama Officers.

As well as this ongoing joint working, co-operation was also evident around particular issues. In 1992, for example, the Theatrical Management Association (TMA) proposed the reduction of writers' royalties from 7.5per cent to 3.5per cent. A co-ordinated response resulted in prominent writers from both TWU and

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[18] *Theatre Writers Newsletter*, Spring 1993, p2.

the Guild putting their names to a statement in opposition to the proposal. In another collaboration, in June 1995, TWU and the Writers' Guild produced their joint proposal for a 'New Writing Fund'[19] – based on the 'dead writers' levy' that TWU had been discussing and campaigning around for a number of years.

Although minutes and correspondence during some of these years indicate some antagonism between the two organisations, there was also clearly goodwill and co-operation among members on both sides; and, in addition to joint negotiations and activities, there were several attempts to bring the two bodies together organisationally. This was finally accomplished in July 1997, in a merger of TWU with the Guild, which combined the membership of both organisations under the name of the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

d) New Playwrights' Trust / Writernet

A third national body, New Playwrights' Trust (NPT), was formed in 1985 (changing its name in 1999 to Writernet). Unlike most of the other organisations discussed here, it was not set up as a self-help group, but rather acted as a service for playwrights, with paid staff to carry out a broad range of work. Its formation came out of a week of activities for young playwrights in London in November 1985, which indicated "that a demand existed that was not being met – a demand for contact with other writers and with theatres, for information, for events and for the increased recognition of new playwrights and their importance to theatre".[20] The need for "something permanent" was expressed not only by

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[19] The Theatre Writers' Union and The Writers' Guild of Great Britain, *The New Writing Fund. A proposal to the Arts Council of England*, June 1995.

[20] Lloyd I.Trott, (1986) Preliminary Enquiry into the Feasibility of a National Playscript Unit, Interim Report 4th September 1986, p.4.

young writers but by new writers more generally.[21] Both playwrights and theatre companies were involved in NPT's foundation; and external funding was secured to pay for a worker to establish and develop the organisation, with a second paid worker being brought in, in 1990.

NPT/Writernet's objectives have been to raise the profile and status of new writing; to provide information and carry out research; and to improve the representation of writers from under-represented groups, such as Black and Asian writers, disabled and women writers, and those writing for young people. It sees itself as a link between writers and producers, aiming to promote the production of new work by writers in all forms of performance media. It has produced newsletters, organised conferences and events, and provided a script-reading service. It also produces resource and information material, for example on literary agents, and on specific areas of interest, such as its guide to script writing for Asian writers. In addition, it publishes a regularly up-dated directory of theatres interested in new writing, with details of their commissioning and script-reading policies (first published in 1992 as *Script to Stage*, and re-named *Script Routes* in 1999).

In 1997 NPT had seven hundred and fifty members, including not only writers, but also theatre companies, literary agents, directors, and television and radio companies. NPT/Writernet has been funded through members' subscriptions and sales of its publications, and by grants from charitable trusts, Regional Arts Boards, and the Arts Council.

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[21] Interview by the author, with Jonathan Meth, Director of New Playwrights' Trust, February 1997.

NPT/Writernet has also worked alongside the other playwriting organisations, campaigning with them and contributing to their discussions and negotiations with the arts funding system. For instance, NPT, TWU, and the Writers' Guild met with the Arts Council in early 1997 to discuss the potential for funding new writing in the recently-introduced National Lottery scheme, Arts for Everyone;[22] and in the late 1990s and early 2000s NPT and the Writers' Guild jointly organised meetings of both regional arts officers and literary managers.

5.1.3 A Growing Movement in the Regions

NPT/Writernet has also co-ordinated meetings amongst the regional playwrights' associations that, following the earlier example of NPS, emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s in what David Edgar has described as "the movement of playwriterly self-help and education" (1993, p.454). Focusing on the development of their craft and the promotion of new playwriting, several of these regional writers' organisations were created, the main ones of which are described here,[23] beginning with North West Playwrights (NWP).

a) North West Playwrights (Workshops)

Established in 1982 by local members of TWU, North West Playwrights' Workshops (as they were initially called) aimed to improve a situation in which almost no new plays were being produced in the region's theatres. Securing grants from the Regional Arts Association and the Arts Council, it "set out to challenge the theatre establishment's firmly held view that the perceived risks

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[22] 'Lottery update', *Writers' Newsletter*, February 1997, Vol.13, No.1, p.4.

[23] Other regional groups have been set up at various times during the 1980s and the following two decades in most parts of England. These have mostly lasted for shorter periods of time than those detailed here, but have provided valuable services for playwrights while they were in existence, including script-reading, training workshops, readings, and showcases.

associated with programming new work were somebody else's responsibility."[24] It was established both to increase the new writing output of regional theatres, and to help playwrights develop their craft.

Initially, it focused on organising an annual event, in which scripts were submitted to a small committee of writers and theatre directors, and out of these six plays were selected for workshopping with professional directors and actors, with the support of a dramaturg, leading to script-in-hand performances to public audiences at regional theatres. Over the following years NWP developed a range of services to help playwrights to learn, practise, and develop their work; to provide showcase opportunities for writers; and to put playwrights and companies in touch with each other, with the purpose of getting new plays produced. To this end it has provided a script-reading service, run a commission and residency award scheme, organised festivals and writers' workshops, and produced a bi-monthly newsletter (from 1995 titled *The Lowdown*).[25]

The success of the organisation has been recognised both externally and internally. In 1988 NWP won the Manchester Evening News Horniman Award "for their outstanding contribution to new writing for the stage".[26] This view was echoed by TWU's newsletter: "[...] think of what the North West branch has achieved over the years, in taking its North West Playwrights scheme from a small locally funded playwriting competition to a prestigious annual event that is known and (increasingly) emulated across Europe!"[27] NWP itself pointed to the

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[24] North West Playwrights, *History and Background 1982-97*. Internal paper, [n.d].
[25] NWP is not a membership organisation, but the interest and support it engenders is indicated by noting that in 1998 150 people subscribed to *The Lowdown*, and that each year around a hundred writers submit their scripts to its script-reading service (ranging from 70 in 1987/8 to 187 in 1993/4.)
[26] Archive of North West Playwrights, Administrative History, p.4.
[27] Theatre Writers Union, *The Newsletter*, Spring 1994, p.12.

twenty-five per cent of its workshopped writers who "have gone on to write professionally" and to the higher proportion of new plays than the national average that were presented in the region's theatres as a result of NWP's activities.[28]

During its first seven years, NWP was run on a voluntary basis by TWU members, but since the end of 1989 it has employed paid staff to organise its activities.[29] In 1993 NWP became a limited company with charitable status, and at this point its committee ceased to be elected annually by members of TWU's North West branch, though it continued to maintain six places on its new board for TWU members. After TWU's merger with the Writers' Guild in 1997, these places were allocated to Guild members; but in January 1998 the board took the decision to terminate this arrangement, on the grounds that it required a range of specific skills to govern the organisation effectively, and that these would not necessarily be found through the automatic appointment of a set number of playwrights. Since that time, writers have continued to serve on the board, but selected on the same basis as theatre directors and producers, and other individuals with particular expertise.

b) Yorkshire Playwrights

Across the Pennines, Yorkshire Playwrights was founded in 1989 to encourage the writing and performance of new plays in the county. To this end it aimed also

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[28] *Fifteen reasons why North West Playwrights should receive support from the Arts Council* [1993], Archive of North West Playwrights, NWP 2/1/1/2.

[29] This was made possible by an increase in its grant support, allowing the employment of a full-time co-ordinator (later renamed as director) and also, subsequently, additional part-time workers. It has continued to receive funding from its Regional Arts Board and from the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, as well as securing some 'one-off' grants for specific projects.

to help writers to "develop their craft",[30] and to establish relationships with local theatre companies. It was set up by members of both TWU and WGGB, in collaboration with West Yorkshire Playhouse, and was, initially, open only to members of the two organisations.

In the following years Yorkshire Playwrights has organised workshops, meetings, and social events for writers; put on seminars and collaborated in events such as a new writing symposium; arranged readings of members' work by professional actors; and run playwriting competitions leading to script-in-hand performances at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. The organisation has also developed active links with writers abroad (cf. Appendix 2). It has also provided a free play-script reading service, and help with developing scripts and with securing the production of plays, for example by providing small grants for this purpose. The group produces a monthly newsletter, 'Newscript', and has paid one of its members to carry out the administration of the organisation on a part-time basis. Its membership has included both "very experienced" playwrights and the "newly emergent", and all members must be aiming to earn at least part of their income from writing.[31] As a membership organisation it is probably closer in form to NPS, though its workshopping activities are similar to those of NWP.[32]

c) Stagecoach! / Script

Stagecoach! was formed in 1992 by members of the West Midlands branch of TWU. Its aims were to discover and develop regional writers and to increase the

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[30] Theatre Writers Union, *Newsletter*, December 1989-January 1990, p.4.
[31] Members of Yorkshire Playwrights interviewed by the author, May 1999.
[32] As an indication of interest in its work it can be noted that Yorkshire Playwrights has had audiences of two hundred for its play-readings, and in 1999 had eighty-five members.

production of new plays in theatres in the region. It offered a script-reading service, for which it charged a small fee, and development workshops run by experienced and established playwrights. It produced a regular newsletter and occasional reports; and organised conferences and discussions about theatre writing, and presentations of new work. For these presentations, which were conceived along the lines of the North West Playwrights' Workshops, playscripts were selected from those submitted to the script-reading service, given workshop development, and then presented as script-in-hand performances in several of the region's theatres. Up to 1999 these performances were organised together as an annual new writing festival: in 1998, for example, ninety scripts were submitted, of which four were presented at the festival in January 1999. In the years from 1996 to 1998 eight writers who had previously received workshop support from Stagecoach! went on to gain productions or commissions from theatres, and awards or commendations, both regionally and nationally.

Stagecoach! was funded by its regional arts board, West Midlands Arts, and had a management board made up mainly of writers and theatre directors or literary managers, together with one or two individuals involved in other aspects of theatre such as acting and drama teaching. In its first few years the writers on its board were nominated by the regional branch of TWU, and formed the majority of the board members. With the expansion of the board in 1997 the proportion of writers fell. The organisation had a paid administrator and, from 1999, also a part-time office assistant.

In 1997 Stagecoach! held a database of over 600 people "actively involved in theatre writing" in the region.[33] A 'clean-up' of the database reduced the number to 300, but continuing new inquiries resulted in further growth to 450 by early 2001. Although never a membership organisation with direct democratic participation like TWU and Northern Playwrights Society, Stagecoach! nonetheless drew on its constituency in planning and implementing its activities, ascertaining their views and needs through questionnaires, and making use of their skills as workshop leaders and script readers. It saw itself as a service for writers, representing their needs rather than acting as representatives of the writers themselves.[34] In 2003 Stagecoach! was re-launched as Script, with a wider brief covering "all forms of dramatic writing",[35] and with some changes to its provision of services.

d) Local Playwrights' Organisations

Local self-help playwrights' groups, based on counties, towns, or neighbourhoods, or around specific interests (for example, women writers), have also grown up in many areas. The focus of these groups is primarily to support their members, through shared discussion of each other's work and different forms of self-generated staging of their own plays (ranging from readings to public performances). Some of these local organisations have been set up by, or with the support of, the regional playwrights' associations. For example, a questionnaire sent out to its members by Stagecoach!, in 2000, elicited interest from seventy-five people in five towns in forming local playwriting groups. Stagecoach! offered advice and assistance in setting these up: by autumn that

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[33] Guy Hutchins, *Chair's report 1996-1997*, December 1997, p.1.
[34] Stagecoach! administrator interviewed by the author, February 1999.
[35] 'Stagecoach becomes Script', *Staging Post*, Issue 20, Spring 2003, p.1.

year the first steps were being taken to do so in two of these areas, and by the following spring the two groups were meeting regularly.

5.2 Playwrights' Organisations: Issues of Democracy

As Chapters 2 and 3 have made clear, questions of democracy run as a thread through the subject of practitioners' role in policy-making, whether in relation to their representation on arts funding bodies, their involvement in consultations, or their engagement in governance of the arts. Commitment to democratic procedures and to widening participation has equally been a matter of importance for the playwrights' organisations themselves.

It is not only the purpose and content of their work, but also the organisational form of most of the playwrights' associations, that has been considered by their members to be particularly important. For much of the period in which they have been active they have had a commitment to an internal participatory democracy. These organisations were established on the basis of all members having equal voting rights on all practical and policy matters, though the form of organisation differed slightly from group to group.

Northern Playwrights, for example, had no structure apart from its monthly members' meetings, for several years; and any administrative work was carried out voluntarily by its members (receiving only a small honorarium in return). However, as NPS took on more activities – setting up bursaries, producing a newsletter, and running members' services – it required a paid co-ordinator to

carry out such work. The difficulty of matching these different needs is graphically illustrated by one of the society's members at that time:

> I don't think that was ever ideal [...]. All the decisions were taken at monthly meetings, and that makes it very hard for a part-time co-ordinator to relate to. It's very difficult, because anybody could come to meetings and all members could vote on all aspects of policy. So somebody could decide on something one month, that they'd try something – let's try this, let's do this. The co-ordinator would go away and work on something and come back, and there'd be different people at the meeting, and they'd say 'no, no, that's not a good idea at all'.[36]

The Theatre Writers' Union experienced similar difficulties. As in NPS, there was an awareness of (and a willingness to be open about) the problems caused by the participatory quality of its democracy. One of its active members in the 1980s describes it thus: "There is no executive council or general secretary to issue instructions. [...] Every member has the same rights, so no newcomers feel that their vote is unimportant or what they have to say is irrelevant. That means it can sometimes be anarchic and frustrating."[37]

Like NPS, TWU also found problems in sustaining voluntary administration by its own members. At times, the organisation was dependent on the activity of so few members that, according to its own assessment, it was in danger of collapsing. [38] The problem was not so much that the membership itself fell below an optimum number, but that there were too few people offering to take on the

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[36] Author's interview with Graeme Rigby, March 1999.
[37] Jacek Laskowski, 'The Theatre Writers' Union', *Writers' Monthly*, March 1988, p.25.
[38] Theatre Writers' Union, *Newsletter*, July 1988, p.5 and January-February 1990, p.9.

responsibilities (of recruitment, administration, negotiation, and campaigning) that were necessary to make the organisation effective. But the decision to appoint a paid secretary or administrator was never straightforward. Minutes of TWU meetings recount discussions and arguments about the search to find a member to take on administrative duties, debates about appointing a non-member with administrative skills instead, and about the amount of money that could be afforded to pay more than just expenses for someone to take on the role.

The commitment to the democratic structure of the union was, though, of such importance to its members that these difficulties were not sufficient to cause any alteration in the basic form of organisation. Jacek Laskowski's point (above) about anarchy and frustration was made in the context of an article encouraging playwrights to join the union, in which he was applauding TWU's democratic credentials. And, during the lengthy discussions that the union engaged in with the Writers' Guild about some form of amalgamation between the two bodies, it was the democratic structure of TWU that was one of the key attributes its members regarded as imperative to keep.

Similarly, North West Playwrights – which was set up by members of TWU – operated in its early years as a co-operative, with a voluntary committee to run all its activities. But as it grew it became "a victim of its own success", with the playwrights involved becoming too busy with its organisation to have time to write their own plays, according to one of the paid staff that were eventually employed (from the end of 1989) to take on those organising tasks.[39] It was thus no longer run fully by its members, and in fact ceased to be a membership

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[39] Author's interview with Director of NWP, January 1999.

organisation and moved to co-opting writers onto its management board rather than having elections for them. While continuing to advocate for playwrights, it therefore no longer claimed to represent them in the way that a membership body would do. It was perhaps with NWP's experience in mind that Stagecoach! was established from the outset as a service for writers rather than a democratically participatory body. But it should also be noted that in both the West Midlands and the North West, playwrights continued to be able to be involved directly in the regional branches of TWU.

5.3 Playwrights' Organisations: Independent Advocates in Civil Society

As the preceding sections have shown, the playwrights' organisations had both strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. For some of them, as groups relying on voluntary effort, they were not always able to reach the standards that their funders and they themselves aspired to. As indicated earlier, TWU members were acutely aware of their shortcomings at times in keeping their organisation functioning adequately and responding promptly enough to outside queries. There were also external criticisms: when TWU presented its first report on 'endangered' playwrights in 1982 it was sharply rebuked for its reliance on only twenty responses to its questionnaire for its findings.[40] Comments were also made on some failures of writers' groups to build links between their members and local theatres. Yorkshire Playwrights for example has been criticised for being "inward looking" (Loretto and Wilson 2003b, p.26); while one of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's associate directors observed that when he first

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[40] Richard Findlater, 'New deal for playwrights?', *The Author*, Spring 1983, pp.4-5.

came to the city in the 1980s the West Midlands TWU branch did not have "real contact" with the region's theatres.[41]

But at the same time, one of the striking features of the playwrights' bodies is the seriousness with which they have approached their activities. Despite depending either entirely or heavily on the voluntary efforts of their members, they have sought to apply a 'professional' attitude and practice to their work. They have, for instance, produced detailed evaluations of their workshop activities; organised training of their script-readers; engaged professional directors, actors, dramaturgs, and writers for their workshops and festivals, and lawyers to deal with their members' contractual disputes; and have carried out extensive and detailed research on many occasions, in order to provide a sound basis for their campaigns.

In terms of the services they provide, the playwrights' organisations have fulfilled a particular role that other bodies in the field are unable or unwilling to offer. Because they are independent agencies, they are able to offer development opportunities for writers that are not tied to the needs of particular theatres or the strategies of arts funders. According to the administrator of one of the writers' groups "people see us as impartial and independent, especially for script-reading and development programmes. We're not looking for scripts for particular theatres."[42] The significance of this lies in the fact that individual theatres are often very specific about their requirements for the plays that they produce, and this is reflected in any report they might give to a writer about his or her script.

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[41] Comment at seminar organised by University of Birmingham MA in Playwriting Studies, 13th March 2001.
[42] Conversation with the author, February 2001.

Indeed, for this reason, Writernet provides a warning to writers thinking of enclosing previous script reports when they send out their play for consideration to "bear in mind that this will usually be of limited interest to another theatre who will be looking at the work from the point of view of its own artistic policy" (Writernet 1999, p.3).

Operating nationally and regionally, the playwrights' organisations also help to overcome the isolation that playwrights experience through the solitary nature of their work, and "establish a sense of community among writers [...], a sharing".[43] The significance of this aspect is underlined by the academic and writer on theatre, John Allen, who is of the opinion that "perhaps the most serious of the contemporary playwright's anxieties is this sense of isolation" (Allen 1981, p.245).

At their most successful the writers' organisations have also fulfilled a role in bringing together not only writers but also a range of organisations and individuals working in the field, through the events they organise. This element of their work is not only an aspect of their role in overcoming writers' isolation, but is also linked to their aim of raising the profile of new playwriting. They regard advocating for new writing in the theatre as a necessary part of their remit in the light of the attitudes that new writing is a risk (for both producers and audiences), and given that new plays have been so frequently squeezed out of theatres' repertoire or consigned to small performance spaces.

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[43] Conversation between writers' group administrator and the author, February 2001.

Chapter 1 examined concepts from public policy studies, and argued that they could be applied to the policy activity of arts organisations. These included ideas about organisations enhancing their resources to give them privileged access in policy consultation. This account of the playwrights' associations has indicated ways in which these groups have organised to increase their resources and thus their influence on policy.

Chapter 3 suggested that the approaches of governance and democratisation, and the concept of civil society, could also be useful in understanding the cultural policy field; and one of the aspects that these ideas share is the importance of independent and active voluntary associations. Central to the concept of civil society is an "emphasis on the dynamics of self-organization" (Gunsteren 1998, p.130). It is where "people form their ideas and organize themselves" (ibid). Bound up with this conception of self-organisation is another key aspect of democratisation, governance, and civil society: the participation of such associations in democratic and civic life. This chapter has begun to show ways in which the playwrights' organisations fulfil these criteria, bringing individual writers together, exploring and developing ideas and policies, and intervening in policy issues in the theatre sector. They can thus be seen as matching up to the voluntary, independent, and engaged agencies that are the components of an active civil sphere and democratic society. In their own internal organisation they have also manifested some of the alternative and experimental forms of participatory democracy discussed in Chapter 3, illustrating both strengths and weaknesses of these.

Chapter 3 also discussed the concept of the common good, and the way in which sectional interests need not run counter to it but can be an integral part of it, since

the common good is a changing reality which is produced out of negotiating and contesting special interests. As we have seen, theatre commentators have noted the role of playwrights' organisations in arguing for changes that benefit not only their own members but are important for the protection and development of theatre more generally. This is certainly how the writers' organisations perceived themselves: "New plays *do* fill theatres and in defending the position of living plays and living playwrights the Theatre Writers' Union is defending not just a sectional interest but the position of the live theatre itself in the cultural life of our times" (original emphasis).[44]

The strategic notions of organisations increasing their resources of expertise and activity to enhance their status and thereby their influence on policy, thus combine with the theoretical explanation of their place in civil society, to give a powerful framework for understanding both the significance of arts practitioners' role in policy-making, and how they can achieve it.

5.4 Theatre Companies

The major focus of this chapter has been on the playwrights' organisations, because of the particular and significant role they have set out to play in attempting to influence policy in their field. However, it is also of course important to pay attention to the other key players in this policy sector: the theatre companies.

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[44] Theatre Writers' Union press release, *Playwrights Call for the Dead Writers Levy*, 11th November 1982.

The previous chapter outlined a model of a triangular relationship among playwrights, theatre companies, and arts funders. Theatre companies 'look both ways' as it were: they join with playwrights in criticising or making demands of arts funders, or in trying to influence policy, but are also a focus themselves of playwrights' attempts to affect their repertoire and operations.

Appendix 3 gives a brief account of some of the main theatres involved in new writing, while the rest of this section considers some general points about theatre companies and their work on new playwriting, their collective organisation, and their role in relation to policy-making.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, in the references to new writing in the Arts Council's Annual Reports, theatres in the subsidised sector have been presenting new plays from the early days of the sector's development after the Second World War. For most subsidised theatres, however, new plays make up a small proportion of their overall programming, and some theatres present them only rarely. From the situation in the first decade of subsidised theatre, when new British playwriting was "decidedly thin on the ground" (Chambers and Prior 1987, p.13), the growth of new writing has not, by any means, been smooth or consistent. Organisational, economic, and political factors affect the number of new plays being presented; and there has been a persistent strand of thought that has designated new writing as a risky venture – although as we have seen this has been challenged by writers' organisations, and questioned by the Arts Council. Many directors, moreover, have seen classic plays as the route by which they can establish their reputation, and against which their work is "defined or tested" (Delgado and Heritage 1996, p.4). It is therefore still the case that new writing

forms only a small part of the programmes of many theatres, with none at all on the main stages of some theatres (Peter Boyden Associates 2000b, p.14).

However, some theatre companies have sought consistently to include new writing in their repertoire, and there are also a number whose prime purpose is to promote new playwriting. Of the building-based companies, most are in London. This has the effect of providing a 'critical mass', which both strengthens and develops new playwriting there, while at the same time creating a national focus and profile for new work. In addition, many of the services and opportunities for playwrights offered by these theatres are open to writers across the country. There are also touring companies which specialise in presenting new plays, thus enabling new writing to be seen more widely. But there is also a necessity for locally- and regionally-based theatres with an interest in new work; and those areas without such a theatre experience a lack of opportunity and focus for new writing. This is underlined in a consultation paper produced by the South West Regional Arts Board which, considering the establishment of a regional theatre dedicated to developing new work, puts forward the argument that "such a theatre would be a major force in producing circumstances conducive to the production of new work throughout the region" (SWA 1997, paragraph 57).

The involvement of theatres in new playwriting is not confined to the commissioning and performance of new plays alone. It also includes reading of 'unsolicited' scripts (theatres have hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of plays sent to them each year) and the provision of the readers' written reports to the playwrights. Theatres offer residencies and attachments; showcases, workshops, readings, and talks. Some organise competitions and awards; the setting up of writers' groups and the provision of space for writers to work and

meet together; projects for young writers; collaborations with other writers' groups; and the publication of playtexts, usually in partnership with established national or local publishers. While some local and regional theatres give priority to playwrights from the immediate locality or region for these opportunities, others, particularly the London-based theatres and touring companies, take on a national remit in offering such services to writers throughout the country (cf. Appendix 3 for more details).

Almost all the theatre companies are members of national management associations: the Theatrical Management Association in the case of the subsidised repertory theatres, and the Independent Theatre Council for the small and medium scale, mostly touring, sector. These associations offer a range of services to their members, representing them in negotiations with the unions and in other forums, organising meetings and events, and providing training, advice, information, and regular newsletters. They are run by committees elected from their membership, and employ professional staff to provide these services and organise the day-to-day running of their offices.

Clearly, there is a central point of common cause between the theatres and the playwrights' organisations in that their aim is to make possible the production of new plays. However, there is also an important difference between them regarding their emphasis on influencing policy. While theatre companies have indeed sought to influence theatre policy, this is almost always the result of external circumstances since their overall function is to produce plays. In contrast, the playwrights' organisations have more often seen policy development as a key feature of their overall purpose. On the other hand, the theatres' management associations do have a function that includes policy

influence; for example, taking part in discussions with the Arts Council over its theatre policy, including its new writing schemes. Theatre companies' involvement in influencing new writing policy is examined further in the next chapter. The next section, meanwhile, considers key issues in which playwrights' organisations have sought to have an influence on the policies of the theatres.

5.5 Theatre Companies and New Playwriting: Issues of Contention

Throughout their existence a major focus of the playwrights' groups has been the operations and policy of the theatre companies. Indeed, it has been argued that "our primary contest was not with the funders but with the theatres".[45] Certainly, for large parts of the time TWU and the Writers' Guild were engaged in negotiations with the theatre managements over contract details, and these two organisations, together with NPT/Writernet and regional and local playwrights' groups, took part in discussions and campaigns to bring about changes in approach by theatre companies on a broad range of matters. These issues include the treatment of unsolicited scripts, commissioning, the presentation of plays in less than full production, the place of the writer in the theatre, and payments to writers.

5.5.1 Unsolicited Scripts

One of the issues that appears repeatedly in the newsletters and papers of the playwrights' organisations is that of how theatre companies respond to unsolicited scripts. For many playwrights, and particularly those who have not

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[45] David Edgar, *Of age at last: Happy birthday to TWU*, draft for TWU Newsletter, [October 1996].

yet become recognised, they are left in the position that they have to approach theatres with a play already written, or partially written, with a view to persuading a company to produce that play or to commission another one on the strength of the script being sent to them. Unless a theatre company is able to employ a literary manager or someone else to read and respond to the scripts they receive, large quantities of playscripts can accumulate and remain unread.

When the Theatre Writers' Union began in 1975 only a handful of theatres had any organised arrangement for dealing with scripts, and even fewer had "literary departments with tolerable systems of reading and registering plays" (Barlas 1975, p.4). As mentioned earlier, this was one of the problems recognised at the event, 'Towards a National Playwrights' Conference', in 1978.

From the point of view of the theatre companies another aspect of the situation was that many of the scripts they received were not of a high enough standard to be considered favourably. This point is made by several of those interviewed for an Arts Council report into setting up a national playscript centre.[46] The Literary Manager of the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, Michael Fox, describes many of the playscripts they receive as being "very poor in quality and often more in search of guidance and encouragement than in expectation of a production"; while David Aukin, the Artistic Director of Leicester Haymarket Theatre, refers to "the lack of quality and suitability for staging [...], often unproduceable scripts".[47]

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[46] Lloyd I.Trott, (1986) Preliminary Enquiry into the Feasibility of a National Playscript Unit, Interim Report 4th September 1986.

[47] Lloyd I.Trott, (1986) Preliminary Enquiry into the Feasibility of a National Playscript Unit, Interim Report 4th September 1986, pp.11-12.

This unsatisfactory situation continued to persist in the following decades. The paper produced by the New Playwrights' Trust during the NAMS consultation in 1991 questioned the quality of "most theatres' treatment of unsolicited work", and called for "a coherent national system".[48] Concerns were expressed by writers about the length of time it took for companies to provide feedback on plays sent to them, and on the quality of that feedback; and frequent complaints were made that there was no reply at all and even that playscripts were lost by companies. The NPT paper points out that such poor responses also involve a financial cost to playwrights, who then have to reproduce extra copies of their scripts.[49] At the same time, theatre companies continued to find that they were sent scripts by writers who had taken no trouble to learn anything about the kind of play the theatre was interested in producing.

Nevertheless, as we have seen above, and is evident in Appendix 3, most of the theatres committed to new writing see a willingness to receive and respond to the scripts sent to them as an important part of their role: a "responsibility to the wider profession [...] and the recognition that feedback on scripts can be a contribution to writers' development" (Writernet 1999, p.3). Even some of those directors lamenting the quality of the scripts sent to them were nevertheless anxious to find a positive solution to the problem. David Aukin, for example, after expressing his concerns to Lloyd I. Trott suggests that the Arts Council should therefore fund dramaturgs to "offer constructive and specific help to writers".[50]

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[48] New Playwrights' Trust, *NPT Submission to NAMS*, [London, 1991?], paragraph1.7.
[49] New Playwrights' Trust, *NPT Submission to NAMS*, [London, 1991?], paragraph1.7.
[50] Lloyd I.Trott, (1986) Preliminary Enquiry into the Feasibility of a National Playscript Unit, Interim Report 4th September 1986, p.12.

However, it is clear that few unsolicited scripts are actually produced. The position frequently stated by theatres is that they prefer to build relationships with writers themselves, helping to develop the writer and their work in partnership. This is borne out by the fact that both individual theatres, and guides for writers (e.g. TWU's members' guide [1986]; Harcourt 1993; Writernet 1999), emphasise the importance of writers ascertaining the interests of the theatres they would like to work with, instead of sending their scripts out indiscriminately. The West Midlands TWU newsletter, for example, asserts that "the best chance you have of getting a play on at the Rep or Belgrade is to watch their productions and know what they do and how".[51] Writernet advises writers to "view the script as a calling card to demonstrate potential and individual style, towards developing a relationship with a theatre company", rather than expecting the first script they send to be produced (Writernet, p.3). Some theatres also suggest that writers send synopses and samples of dialogue rather than complete scripts as a way of making the initial approach.

It is still the case that many theatres do not have the resources to respond adequately to scripts sent to them, but the situation has undoubtedly improved. Indeed, the literary manager of the Soho Theatre, one of the leading new-writing companies, was able to say in 1997 that he thought the reason that considerable numbers of scripts are sent to British theatres from elsewhere in the world is "because people know that if they send a play here, we'll actually read it and we'll write back to them with a few thoughts. Whereas in a lot of countries,

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[51] West Midlands TWU, *The Page*, September-October 1994, [p.1].

there's no dramaturgical interaction at all. [...] I think Britain's looked upon as a bit of a role model in theatre."[52]

Although one should be cautious in making a direct correlation, certainly this improvement in theatre companies' treatment of unsolicited scripts was not only the result of the work and attitudes of the theatres themselves but also coincided with the efforts of the playwriting organisations. The comments and complaints in the minutes of the playwrights' organisations were reflected in the proposals they put to theatres and funders, and in the focus of their campaigns. These had both a local and a national dimension. A 'priorities' paper of the West Midlands branch of TWU in 1988 called for a full-time literary manager to be appointed at one of the main theatres in the region and, when this eventually occurred at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the TWU branch was of the opinion that their pressure had helped to secure this post.[53] Nationally, TWU made an input into the preparation of ITC's new writing guidelines, with the result that "the author seemed to have taken on board most of the points that Union members had made at draft stage".[54] In addition, as we have seen, NPT made suggestions for a national system to deal with scripts in its submission to NAMS.

Playwrights' organisations also took matters into their own hands. They organised workshops such as Stagecoach!'s 'How to get your play read' sessions led by theatre directors, and produced their own guides to writers (e.g. TWU's *Guide for New Members*, [1986] and Writernet's *Script Routes*, 1999). These

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[52] Paul Sirett interviewed by David James, 'Soho Seasons', *Writers' Newsletter*, April 1997, pp.12-13.
[53] TWU Annual General Meeting Minutes, 18th May 1996, 'Branch Delegates' Reports'.
[54] TWU *Newsletter*, summer 1993, p.3.

activities further raised awareness of the issue and are therefore likely to have helped to change attitudes towards the treatment of playscripts.

5.5.2 Commissioning and Producing

A further, closely related, issue is that of commissions and their production. In 1974 the Assistant Drama Director of the Arts Council questioned the success of its commissions scheme, since "of the 14 plays commissioned through the Arts Council only eight have so far achieved even a single production" (Andrews 1974, p.91). The mismatch between commissions and productions was also noted by Colin Chambers in relation to the National Theatre's "habit of 'buying' lots of scripts but staging very few" (Chambers 1980, p.49), and by the West Midlands branch of the Theatre Writers' Union which carried out a survey of the region's theatres in the early 1980s and discovered that they "appear to commission more than they perform". [55]

This was still an issue at the beginning of the 1990s, when the New Playwrights' Trust pinpointed the problem as one of "poor development" and suggested that "there needs to be scrutiny of relationships between commissioners and writers".[56] This echoes the point made by Chambers that "commissioning has its problems": on the one hand, writers "may not come up with the goods, or may produce a script that is not up to standard"; on the other hand, because "commissioning is a gesture of trust in the writer, there are serious consequences if it is not honoured in full [...] or worse, if it is not honoured at all [by the theatre company]" (Chambers 1980, p.59).

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[55] Theatre Writers' Union, West Midlands Branch ,*Report on New Writing in the Area*, 1983, p.3.
[56] New Playwrights' Trust, *NPT Submission to NAMS*, [London, 1991?], paragraph1.4.

A recurring theme in the newsletters and minutes of the playwrights' organisations is the desire of writers to see their work 'on its feet'. This reflects an understandable wish for their work to bear fruit – for it to be realised in front of an audience. It is also a necessary part of the process of creating the work itself, for it is widely recognised in the theatre community that a new play needs to go through the process of rehearsal, and almost certainly the accompanying re-writing, in order to reach its proper finished state. Commissions that do not lead to production are therefore doubly frustrating for writers. There is an indication that some improvement had taken place by the late 1990s: the Arts Council's Theatre Writing Officer at this time estimated that 90% of the commissions the Council granted, mainly to small-scale theatre companies, were professionally produced.[57]

It is worth noting that not all playwrights seek to be commissioned, preferring to write with the freedom to develop their work without the prior expectations or restraints (such as of subject matter or timescale) that might be created by a commission. Michael Frayn, a highly regarded British dramatist, has opted for a commission only once in his career;[58] while Robert Holman, who has had plays performed at some of England's major theatres, "would like to do without commissions at all. 'The ideal, if you have the strength to do it, is just to write a play and find a theatre'".[59] Playwright Charlotte Keatley explains that the pressures produced by a commission are both internal and external, saying that

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[57] Telephone interview by the author, 1997.
[58] Comment by Michael Frayn at seminar organised by University of Birmingham MA in Playwriting Studies, 9th March 1999.
[59] Robert Holman quoted in Robert Hewison, 'Case of the disappearing playwrights', *Sunday Times*, 26th May 1985, p.41.

she does not "write for commission [...] because I don't want to give myself or anyone else an expectation upfront".[60]

Nonetheless, for the majority of playwrights both the commissioning of a play and its realisation on stage are of great importance. Even for a relatively successful writer, doing without commissions is not financially feasible, as Holman points out himself. For these reasons the playwrights' organisations have thus argued not only for better commission rates but also for increases in the number of commissioned plays produced.

5.5.3 Workshops and Rehearsed Readings

The previous chapter explained the debate on development versus production as it was manifested in relation to the work that playwrights' organisations have undertaken with new and developing writers. There is another, closely related, aspect that is relevant in this section on the issues of contention between theatre companies and writers' organisations, and that is the question of workshops and rehearsed readings promoted by some theatres in place of full productions of new work.

Concern has been expressed by playwrights that although such activities frequently give "invaluable help" to writers,[61] some theatres have used them as an alternative to productions rather than employing such methods as part of a process of developing the writer and the play. The TWU's members' guide, updated in the early 1990s, noted that "workshops and readings are proliferating"

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[60] Charlotte Keatley, 'A Work in Progress', *The Lowdown* (North West Playwrights' newsletter), No.25, May-July 1999, [p.6].
[61] TWU, *Newsletter* [between April and July 1990], no page numbers.

and went on to say that "the suspicion must be that some theatres are using them to maintain the appearance of a commitment to new work".[62] An article in the Writers' Guild newsletter in 1994 criticises theatres that "offer workshops or readings as a token gesture to new work. No playwright I know wants a workshop [...]. Plays were meant to be played, not read. What playwrights want is a production!"[63] New-writing theatres like the Royal Court and Soho Theatre hold a similar view, regarding workshops and rehearsed readings as "tools" in the development of plays for production, rather than as "consolation prizes".[64]

It is evident from the previous chapter that in fact writers *are* interested in workshops, but the point made in these articles, and by other playwrights in meetings and discussions reported in minutes and newsletters, is that they do not want them as a *substitute* for proper performances.

The other aspect of concern in relation to such activities is the lack of ground rules for their conduct. The TWU guide therefore advised writers who are offered workshops or readings to be cautious, to make demands of director and actors, and to seek clarification of the purpose of the activity. It also pointed out that it is "rare for anything more than expenses to be paid to those involved" and that at most a writer might receive "a nominal fee of a hundred pounds or so".[65] Paying writers for their work in developing their scripts during workshops has been seen as essential by the playwrights' organisations in their own activities: both North

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[62] Kevin Mandry and Antony Pickthall (eds), *Theatre Writers Union Members Guide*, [n.d.], p.10.
[63] Allen Saddler, 'Getting Your Play On: Report from the South West', *Writers' Newsletter*, Spring 1994, Vol.10, No.1, p.6.
[64] Paul Taylor, 'Let's do the new plays right here', *Independent*, 2 October 1996, section 2, p.9.
[65] Kevin Mandry and Antony Pickthall (eds), *Theatre Writers Union Members Guide*, [n.d.], pp.10-11.

West Playwrights and Stagecoach!, for example, introduced payments for the playwrights in the very first workshops they ran in 1983 and 1992 respectively.

5.5.4 The Writer As Part of a Team

The idea of isolation as a significant aspect of the experience of the playwright, and the role of the playwrights' organisations in helping to overcome this, has already been noted. The very fact of being part of such an organisation is important for many writers. The Writers' Guild draws attention to the point on its web-site, noting that "writing is by its nature a solitary occupation" and going on to say that " membership of the Writers' Guild means that writers need not be isolated [...]. Our professional, cultural and social activities enable writers to be part of a community, in touch with each other and with new ideas".[66]

Another way that the playwrights' organisations help to overcome isolation is in their negotiations with other bodies, and in particular with theatre companies, in order to create conditions in which writers can be integrated into the theatre as part of a team. This has proved to be necessary not only because of the solitary nature of writing, but also because playwrights have often felt excluded from the life of the theatre, even when writing for a particular company.

Barnard (1991) suggests that "too many writers [...] even at theatres with the best practice, are abandoned after their first commission and writers with commissions from many regional reps are too often left to their own devices" (p.42). Letters and articles in the newsletters of the playwrights' groups contain complaints about writers being left uninformed about developments in the

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[66] *Welcome to the Writers' Guild*, http://www.writersguild.org.uk (accessed 17th August 2003).

production of their own play; while an article in *The Stage* refers to "writers banned from rehearsals while actors and director set about the script".[67] Playwright Richard Nelson observes, from experience, that "if the playwright's been kept at arm's length from the beginning or the relationship is distant, then you don't have trust [...] you have chaos or you have hell" (Nelson and Jones, (ed.) Chambers 1995, p.103).

From the theatres' point of view, some directors have of course experienced difficulties with writers, but this should not negate the overall point that in a profession as collaborative as theatre necessarily is, writers should be seen as part of the team. In this context Allen (1981) agrees that it is "necessary to reintegrate the playwright into the ensemble" (pp.245-6). He goes on to say "It is this reintegration which is the outstanding feature of the new contracts at present being negotiated by [...] the Theatre Writers' Union" (p.246). What he is referring to is the clause that TWU included in its first draft of a standard agreement for the theatre companies, whereby playwrights would be entitled to be paid for their attendance at rehearsals, and which the Writers' Guild also supported when the two organisations became jointly involved in the negotiations with theatre managements. This has continued to be a very important part of the contract agreements, together with other features that allow the writer to be involved in the choice of the director, designer and cast for the play, and to be consulted about its publicity material.

As we have seen, other ways in which theatre companies have helped to draw writers into the life of the theatre is through writers' groups, residencies, and

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[67] Ann Fitzgerald, 'To be this good takes stages', *Stage and Television Today*, 5th August 1993, p.27.

attachments which, at their best, have proved invaluable both to the playwrights and to the theatres involved. But such resources have not been widespread, and initiatives have therefore also been taken by playwrights' organisations in an attempt to bring writers and theatre companies closer together. Stagecoach! operated, for a while, a seeding scheme to encourage theatre companies to work with writers, whereby awards were given to enable companies to develop a script with a writer, and to "progress the relationship between the writer and the theatre company", leading "ideally towards a full commission being offered".[68] Other playwrights' organisations have offered similar programmes.

Such schemes in fact encapsulate several aspects of the issues discussed in this chapter. Firstly, they engage with the reluctance of theatres to produce unsolicited scripts, and the advice to playwrights not to submit scripts without first gaining knowledge of the theatres concerned. Secondly, they attempt to deal with the concerns of playwrights about workshops and development which do not result in commissions. And thirdly, they help to overcome playwrights' isolation by encouraging companies to work closely with a writer.

5.5.5 Paying the Playwright

While Chapter 4 considered the issue of finance with regard to the arts funders' schemes for supporting new writing, this section looks at the issue in relation to theatres. As indicated earlier, financial hardship has been a persistent characteristic of writing for the theatre, and many theatre writers have to supplement their income from a variety of other sources. According to Allen "most professional playwrights earn a large proportion of their income from

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[68] Circular letter from Mick Yates, Administrator of Stagecoach!, 18th July 1995.

writings or activities irrelevant to the theatre";[69] and Billington adds that writing for the stage "is becoming, for too many dramatists, an occasional occupation which they squeeze in between film and television projects which are the real earners".[70] Of over three hundred playwrights (members of TWU and of the Writers' Guild) who responded to a survey in 1986, sixty-nine per cent earned less than £5,000 from writing for the theatre in the two preceding years (TWU 1987, p.29). The average annual wage at this time was £8,700.[71] Circumstances such as these provided the impetus for the playwrights' organisations to seek not only more funds for new writing from the arts funders, but also a standard contract with the theatre managements in order to ensure that levels of payment were consistent for all writers in all subsidised theatres.

Over the years the writers' organisations have been asked to intervene in numerous disputes where playwrights did not receive the agreed rate for a new play, often with positive results. As we saw in the last chapter, a major instance of underpayment occurred in the early 1980s, when many devolved theatres were found to be underpaying playwrights. A paper produced by TWU estimated then that only a quarter of these theatres were paying the standard rate, and that over half had paid less than the standard for four consecutive years.[72] TWU succeeded in achieving the correct payments for some writers, and the Arts Council's Drama Department was persuaded to write to the theatres about the issue. Other instances occurred in later years: a TWU newsletter giving advice on signing contracts recounts that "the Delegate Committee [of TWU] has been having to

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[69] John Allen, *The contemporary playwright in the European theatre*, draft paper, July 1979, p.26.
[70] Michael Billington, 'Where have all our playwrights gone?', *Guardian*, 5th March 1988, p.16.
[71] Department of Employment (1986) *Employment Gazette*, Vol.94, No.2, p.S46.
[72] TWU, *Underpayment of Playwrights: Devolution and the TMA theatres*, December 1983.

sort out more and more contractual messes".[73] A newsletter item on a dispute between a writer and a theatre company gives an illustration of how serious these 'messes' might be: "The Manchester Branch of TWU has advised all members not to submit work to this company and to withdraw any scripts already with them. The company have been performing the play *without permission or payment*" (my emphasis).[74]

TWU and the Guild were therefore involved in negotiating, and later renewing, the standard contract agreements and at the same time ensuring that they were adhered to. The negotiations themselves often took years, with disagreements proving intractable at times, and frustration being palpable. For example, a letter from the TWU and Writers' Guild Negotiating Committee to the Theatres' National Committee begins "we are well into the third year of these negotiations. These have been years of mounting inflation and this delay has benefited the producers greatly".[75] The following year, at the end of five years of negotiations with the Independent Theatre Council the proposed contract was finally rejected by ITC, to the dismay of playwrights who felt they might be left with no alternative but to go on strike against ITC companies.[76] Understandably, from the theatres' standpoint, they were facing financial difficulties and felt that they could not afford higher rates. But as the writers' organisations pointed out, not all people working in the theatre sector were having to accept a drop in their earnings, and in a noticeable number of instances, as we have seen, writers were actually receiving less than the agreed rate. Clearly, whatever financial restrictions theatre companies were experiencing, the playwrights' groups felt

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[73] TWU, *Newsletter*, August 1989, p.10.
[74] TWU, *Newsletter*, [between December 1985 and February 1986], p.15.
[75] Letter reproduced in TWU *Newsletter*, August 1989, pp.14-15.
[76] Robin Stringer, 'Theatre writers threaten strike', *Evening Standard*, 17th October 1990.

justified in defending the interests of the dramatist in these circumstances, and were not willing to let situations like these go unchecked.

5.6 Conclusion

Following Chapter 4, which discussed the arts funders and their policies on new playwriting, this chapter has aimed to introduce the other principal organisations involved in new writing for the stage, and to consider the main issues with which they are concerned, including areas of contention between theatre companies and playwrights' groups. Indeed, as recounted earlier, it was the lack of contractual arrangements with theatres and the subsequent feeling of writers that they were the "Cinderella" of the theatre sector,[77] that fuelled the development of the playwrights' self-help movement.

This relationship of contention reveals another aspect of the triangular connections among playwrights, theatre companies and arts funders; for in some of these issues of dispute between companies and writers, the latter have sought help from the Arts Council to resolve them. Thus, in 1983, after prompting by the writers' organisations, the Council's New Writing Officer had written to remind theatres of their obligations to spend their new writing funds on the purpose for which they were granted;[78] while in 1994 the officer then in post sent a letter to theatres about their new writing policies, "closely based on the draft submitted to him by ourselves [i.e. TWU and the Writers' Guild]".[79]

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[77] Ann Fitzgerald, 'To be this good takes stages', *Stage and Television Today*, 5th August 1993, p.27.
[78] West Midlands TWU, *Newsletter*, 28th September 1983.
[79] Theatre Writers' Union General Meeting minutes, 19th November 1994, p.5.

This is the mirror image of the joint activity undertaken on occasion by the playwrights' organisations and theatres with regard to Arts Council policies. So, although there have been important issues of disagreement between theatre companies and playwrights' organisations, the two have also worked together. Sometimes this joint work arises from their recognition of the need to make a combined approach to the arts funders, but also, as is shown in more detail in the next chapter, there has been a range of activities to promote and develop new playwriting on which they have collaborated.

There are many shared points of interest between theatre companies and playwrights; and so, even when challenging theatres on the issues, the writers' organisations have remained aware of the difficulties faced by them. Thus, for instance, when TWU was gathering information about theatres' treatment of unsolicited scripts, it explained that it wished to "suggest a way forward to theatres – a practical set of guidelines which would have the unions' stamp of approval and yet not stretch theatres' over-burdened finances to breaking point".[80] Similarly, although Allen Saddler in the Writers' Newsletter article cited earlier is sharply critical of theatres' practice in relation to new playwriting, saying that "it is easier to plant an unexploded bomb in a theatre than to get past the door with a new play", he goes on "you can't blame them [theatres] too much. One dud production in a year puts them in a financial hole."[81]

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[80] *Unsolicited Scripts* – unattributed insert in TWU Executive Committee Minutes, 5th March 1994.

[81] Allen Saddler, 'Getting Your Play On: Report from the South West', *Writers' Newsletter*, Spring 1994, Vol.10, No.1, p.6.

Equally, the writers' organisations have recognised and welcomed the positive features of theatre companies' work, for instance discussing with the Arts Council their wish to publicise the "many examples of good practice in the choosing of writers and ways of working, and in the quality of support offered to a writer as she or he works on her or his play".[82]

This chapter has illustrated ways in which theatre practitioners have organised themselves to contribute to the development of playwriting policy. Setting up their own organisations, they have taken initiatives (including research, writing development activities, joint campaigns and negotiations) which increase their resources and profile, thus opening up opportunities for policy influence. Playing a part in policy activity in this way, they embody the idea of the voluntary and independent associations that are necessary participants in the sphere of civil society.

Clearly, the interconnections amongst the different actors concerned with new playwriting are a significant feature of the landscape in which they engage in policy activity. The next chapter examines further the ways in which these organisations interact with each other. It discusses the forms of participation in which practitioners have been engaged, and the networks in which they have been involved; and it draws out and focuses on key issues arising from these connections, and their effects on the development of new writing policy.

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[82] Draft of letter on behalf of TWU Arts Council Sub-Committee, December 1987.

Chapter 6

New Playwriting: Networks of Policy and Practice

The two previous chapters have introduced the principal agents concerned with new playwriting policy, the issues with which they have been concerned, their involvement in consultations, and the actions they have taken themselves to influence policy. This chapter further investigates the role of practitioners in theatre writing policy by examining in more detail the range of channels, processes, and methods by which organisations at national, regional, and local level take part in policy-making, and discussing key issues about their participation. It then considers the inter-relationships amongst the organisations involved in the sector and argues that these networks have a significant effect on theatre practitioners' involvement in policy formation and implementation. The chapter links these points to the analytical frameworks presented in Part I of the thesis, showing that the involvement in networks contributes to making practitioners' groups more resource-rich, and enhancing their participation as voluntary associations in civil society.

The next sections consider the two main forms of involvement and influence that have emerged from my research into new playwriting policy, which can be categorised as 'invited' and 'uninvited'. These two principal ways in which theatre practitioners have participated in policy activity are firstly through the official channels of consultation and review, and secondly by their own initiatives to create and open up arenas in which they can attempt to influence policy and implementation. In reality the two forms often cut across each other. On the one hand, official channels ignore or bypass the organised communities of

practitioners; instead, as we have seen, selecting individuals for consultation in line with their own criteria. On the other hand, practitioners' bodies push consultations further than planned, organising their own interventions in them. But the distinction between invited and uninvited is nonetheless a useful one, as it enables us to understand more fully the circumstances in which arts practitioners have participated in policy activity and the ways they have reacted to those circumstances.[1]

6.1 Invitations to Influence Policy

Within the category of invited activity are the consultations, reviews, and enquiries initiated by arts funders and government. Theatre practitioners are invited to make an input in two ways: some are brought into the process by being selected to serve on some form of committee conducting the review or enquiry; but for most theatre workers, participation is confined to specific stages of the process. These usually take the form of meetings to discuss a consultation document, with the opportunity also to submit views in writing. There might then be another period of consultation around the version of the document revised as a result of the initial discussions.

Consultations of this kind have become quite common in the recent history of arts policy development, reflecting the general trend noted by Maloney and colleagues (1994) which describes consultation as a "growing phenomenon"

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[1] Policy influence can also sometimes be inadvertent or indirect. In other words, the organisations concerned are not consciously setting out to affect policy, but their work or the way they operate has an influence nevertheless. My interest here though is with deliberate and conscious efforts to participate in policy processes.

during the 1980s and into the 1990s (p.23). Quoting Hansard, they point to an increase of governmental consultative documents from 11 to 267 between 1976 and 1990 (p.24).

Since 1980 consultations have been initiated by the Arts Council on broad topics which are of concern to theatre practitioners, such as the National Lottery, and education and training in the arts; general enquiries into the arts like the National Arts and Media Strategy which, as we have seen, took the form of a major consultation exercise; as well as those reviews pertaining specifically to the theatre field.

Extensive consultation took place during the theatre enquiry undertaken during 1986 and published as *Theatre **is** For All* (ACGB, 1986) later that year. Similarly, the *Policy for Drama of the English Arts Funding System*, published a decade later, was, according to its Foreword, "the result of a process of review and consultation which involved artists, promoters, administrators, audiences, Regional Arts Boards and drama industry lead organisations" (ACE 1996c, [p.ii]).[2]

In 1999, the Arts Council's Boyden Review of regional producing theatres saw a wide-ranging consultation process consisting of several stages, with meetings held in all ten of the English arts regions. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the shift of focus in the review from the regional repertory theatres to the future of theatre provision in England more generally – the wider theatre 'ecology' – emerged

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[2] As evidence of this process of consultation the Arts Council published a synopsis (very poorly-written and edited, it has to be said) of the submissions they received (ACE: 1996d).

directly from this consultation process. This was the result of a number of factors, particularly the involvement of a wide range of theatre organisations in the regional consultation meetings and the concerted efforts of the Independent Theatre Council, representing small and middle scale companies.

Linked to the Boyden Review, the Arts Council also produced in May 2000 a theatre policy statement, *The Next Stage* (ACE, 2000b), and arranged for discussions to take place, including with "the theatre community".[3] Again, theatre practitioners were involved not only in the meetings organised by the Arts Council and RABs, but also set up their own events and made efforts to encourage responses to the consultation document. ITC, for instance, planned regional meetings of its members and reminded them to contribute in writing to the review process.[4] The result of this consultation, in July of that year, was the *National Policy for Theatre in England* (ACE, 2000c).

Consultations have also taken place on a regional basis: at least seven theatre reviews, by six of the ten Regional Arts Boards, were conducted during the 1990s. An examination of these reveals that theatre practitioners were involved at some stage of the proceedings. For example, North West Arts Board's review of regional theatre provision, published in 1997, lists in its appendices seven "consultative sessions" during 1995 and 1996, five of which involved theatre practitioners, one which was for local authorities, and one open meeting (NWAB 1997, p.47). When, in 1996, South West Arts began a review of its policy on new theatre writing it held a number of "informal consultative meetings" with

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[3] Arts Council of England press release, *Arts Council sets out new vision for theatre*, 18th May 2000, p.3.

[4] Independent Theatre Council, *Policy Matters*, Issue 4, July 2000, p.2.

playwrights in the region, and then produced a discussion paper to which it requested "responses [...] comment and advice", before producing its final policy document (SWA 1997, Foreword, [p.ii]).

In addition to reviews which they have initiated themselves, the Regional Arts Boards have also undertaken consultations as part of the policy-making process for national reviews instigated by the Arts Council. The aim of these is to provide participants with the opportunity to meet and discuss their views before sending their written submissions directly to the Arts Council themselves, as well as helping to inform the RAB's own response to the consultative document.

At the local level there has been an increasing number of reviews undertaken by local authorities that have touched on the concerns of theatre practitioners. Usually, these reviews cover arts policy or cultural policy generally, rather than theatre policy specifically; although some have a section focusing particularly on theatre provision. As indicated in Chapter 4, this increase in such review processes arose particularly following the issuing of guidelines to local authorities by the DCMS for the production of local cultural strategies (DCMS, 1999a and 2000) and the expectation (though not statutory requirement) that all local councils would put such strategies into place. Consultation is seen in the guidance as essential to the process of producing a cultural strategy: "meaningful active consultation with a wide range of organisations and local people [...] is central" (DCMS 2000, p.10), "it is fundamental to the strategy process" (DCMS 2000, p.29); and it forms two of the seven stages set out by the DCMS for the achievement of a strategy.

The local authorities studied in my research[5] were at varying stages of producing their cultural strategies, and had adopted differing methods of doing so. Several of them had carried out reviews of their arts or cultural policy, in which some level of consultation had been a feature. (Others had not yet begun, or were only beginning to embark on, the process of seeking external views on their strategies.) These reviews illustrate the wide variation in approach that can be encompassed by the notion of consultation, with some allowing greater opportunity for involvement than others.

One of the councils consulted with about two hundred arts organisations in the city, and included discussion groups, and an audit of the arts organisations, as well as the circulation of initial papers and a report. Another involved arts providers in a strategy group, aimed at shaping the strategy and bringing more arts organisations into the process. A third authority, in contrast, adopted an approach whereby it deliberately excluded representatives of single arts organisations in a number of task groups that it set up to produce its draft cultural strategy in order to avoid, according to its arts officer, the possibility of people lobbying for their own organisation. Instead these task groups were made up of individuals with relevant expertise and a broad knowledge of the field, including practitioners in the sector. The draft strategy produced as a result of this process was then sent out for consultation, but only to the major arts organisations supported by the council, with other arts practitioners having to request a copy.

The scale of consultation required can be daunting for those local authorities attempting broad participation. One authority's arts officer, where detailed

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[5] Local authorities studied were: Birmingham, Coventry, Leeds, Newcastle, Sheffield, Worcester, and the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

information was sought from all its arts organisations, "regretted" the huge effort involved; although he also emphasised that it usefully helped to "engage local groups in the process and gave them recognition which they don't often get".[6]

As can be seen from these examples consultation is often an on-going process, for development of strategy is, necessarily, not just a 'one-off' occurrence. Indeed, the DCMS Guidelines emphasises the importance of local authority cultural strategies not being "fixed in stone" (DCMS 2000, p.32) and the need for their periodic review (p.37). An illustration of how this might take place in practice can be found in the development of Birmingham's arts strategy. In 1990 its first corporate arts strategy was produced, being developed through discussions with some arts practitioners in the city. In 1997 it was felt that changing circumstances necessitated the development of a new arts strategy, and a series of consultation seminars were set up by the council, involving a wide range of city-based arts workers. These took place primarily in the early stages of the review, although one meeting was held in the autumn of 1998 to comment on the proposals, and to offer suggestions for 'fine-tuning' them. Two years later, again responding to changes in external circumstances (and possibly also to political change that had taken place in the council), a consultative meeting was held specifically with theatre practitioners to discuss ideas on the development of theatre in the city.

Occasionally a variation on the conventional forms of consultation is tried. An interesting instance of this is the *Elements* project set up in County Durham in 1999, and involving the county council, district councils, the Regional Arts

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[6] Interview by the author, June 1999.

Board and three local theatre companies. The aim of the project was to create an infrastructure for the development of theatre in the county through a variety of activities, including commissioning new work and organising a festival. Initiated by the RAB, county council, and district arts officers, theatre practitioners were invited onto the steering committee which then developed the project, submitted an application to the National Lottery for funding, and – following the success of the bid – oversaw the delivery of the project. Theatre practitioners were thus involved at an early stage in shaping the project. The view of County Durham's arts development manager was that "the project can't move forward without the theatre companies."[7] In this way the *Elements* project goes beyond consultation alone, and represents an example of governance, as discussed in Chapter 3, where a range of agencies are engaged in policy development and delivery.

Although the project did not fulfil all its remit (mainly, it seems, due to council staffing problems) it may be that this kind of collaboration can provide a useful model for the involvement of theatre practitioners in policy creation. For the conventional forms of consultation, outlined earlier, raise a number of questions in relation to their effectiveness and reliability. These questions were considered largely in conceptual terms in Chapter 3, and will now be discussed in relation to examples from my research. They particularly concern matters of selection and representation; resources, recognition and influence; and consultation and agreement.

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[7] Telephone interview by the author, July 2000.

6.1.1 Issues in Consultative Participation

Under the heading of selection and representation there is, firstly, the issue of who is invited to contribute. While the lists of those invited to take part in consultations often seem comprehensive, my research also indicates that in some instances only a limited number of organisations have been contacted about participating even though a larger number will be affected by the ensuing policy. This results in a perceived lack of openness about the policy making process, and is responsible for creating resentment among those who have been excluded.

This was evident in relation to an Arts Council review of its theatre writing strategy in 1999. A small working party was established in March that year and a draft strategy produced in September. However, the draft was not widely distributed and it seemed that there was no broad invitation to theatre practitioners to comment on the draft. Some *were* consulted, either directly by the Drama Department or through their RAB, but there was considerable dissatisfaction with the process and a feeling of lost opportunity amongst those concerned with new writing at the time.

A second issue about the consultation process is that not all those contacted take up the invitation; and not all those responding to the invitation to attend meetings then submit their views in writing. For instance, twenty-one representatives of organisations concerned with theatre attended West Midlands Arts' consultation on the Boyden Report in February 2000. Yet in the Appendix of the Final Report which lists the organisations subsequently writing to the Arts Council, only three of these are from the West Midlands (Peter Boyden Associates 2000b, Appendix F).

There are a variety of reasons that theatre practitioners do not take up these invitations to participate in the consultation process. They undoubtedly include pressure of work: finding the time to prepare for and attend such meetings, and particularly to put one's views into writing, is often problematic, for example for a theatre director or administrator, when there are pressures not only to produce the theatre that is the organisation's raison d'etre, but also to achieve the audience and raise the finances necessary to ensure the survival of the organisation. Even some of the playwrights' associations, whose aims include extending support for new writing, and who would therefore be expected to prioritise making an input into policy consultations, find it difficult to make the time needed in addition to maintaining their organisations and developing their own work, especially when their staff are only voluntary or part-time, or when they need to consult with board or committee members. For instance, at the time of the Boyden Review, the part-time administrator of one of the playwrights' organisations explained that it was difficult to get the board together except for its regular meetings. Her solution in such a situation was to send out the information to the board members in case they were able to respond on an individual basis.[8]

For those initiating consultations it is therefore necessary to allow a sufficient period for responses in order to minimise this difficulty. On some occasions, though, little time is allowed for submissions to be made, and this affects both busy theatre workers and those organisations needing to consult first with their own members. This problem is recognised by Barbara Jeffrey (1997) in her study of participation in local government, where she notes that the existence of "very

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[8] Telephone conversation with the author, October 2000.

rigid time constraints [...] undermines [groups'] own participatory responsibilities in relation to their grassroots constituents" (p.28). Awareness of this issue is sometimes evident in the organisation of arts consultations. In a letter inviting responses to the Cork Enquiry its secretary, Ian Brown, wrote "If you wish to submit evidence, but the consultative procedures of your organisations make this deadline difficult [...] let me know the date by which you can submit evidence".[9] Brown's particular awareness of the difficulty, and his willingness to allow for it, is no doubt a result of his own prior experience as a member of North West Playwrights. But a call nearly a decade later for the Arts Council to consult "as early as possible with a realistic schedule" (NCA 1994, p.1) suggests that this continued to be a shortcoming.

It is also clear from my research, and this relates as well to the questions considered in Chapter 3 under the heading of consultation and agreement, that a significant factor influencing practitioners' decisions about taking part in consultation is a perception that it is futile to do so. There is a not uncommon feeling among practitioners that the consultation process is a notional gesture, with the official policy-makers (arts funders or government) setting out with a pre-set 'agenda' or limiting remit, or likely only to adopt those ideas which fit into their goals and assumptions. During my researches a number of practitioners said that they felt the views of their organisations would not be taken into account even though they were being invited to contribute to discussion, and they therefore felt a reluctance to do so.

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[9] Copy of letter from Ian Brown in David Edgar's personal archive, dated 16th December 1985.

In other instances, those involved with theatre provision have participated in the consultation process and were then disappointed by the result. In 1992, for example, Northern Arts undertook a major review of drama provision in the region. In the appendices of the final document acknowledgement is given to "all the artists and arts organisations who gave their time and advice", and to "the large number of individuals and organisations who contributed to the process and took time to write with their views or attend meetings" (Northern Arts 1992, Appendix I). An extensive range of theatre companies, artistic directors, venues, local authorities, and others such as the Northern Playwrights Society, are listed as having been consulted.

Yet, examining the papers of Northern Arts dealing with this review subsequently, it is clear that there was some very strong opposition to the decisions reached through the process. One aspect of this opposition was centred around the recommendation that Northern Arts would support one regional company specialising in new writing: "many feared that the onus for producing new writing would be taken away from other companies and nearly all wanted a more region wide process to the development of new writing".[10] Northern Arts did say that it would respond to these concerns, making new writing a condition of grant to the other companies it supported, and proposing extra funds be granted to Northern Playwrights for the development of services across the region. Nevertheless, some of those consulted clearly felt that their views had had little or no effect. Graeme Rigby, referring to the review in his later report on new writing in the region, commented that "although [playwrights'] views

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[10] Northern Arts, paper for Northern Arts Board meeting, 'The Drama Review: Action Plan for Implementation', April 1993, section 5.1.

attracted sympathy, their unchallenged arguments slipped down the order of priorities in the face of more pressing political considerations" (Rigby, p.5).

Furthermore, and this leads on to the issues under the heading of resources, recognition and influence, there is a perception among potential participants that only some favoured organisations and individuals are listened to. There are many instances both of this feeling and of the actual occurrence, where it is clear that some organisations carry more weight than others. This not only affects the policy process, but also its content. For example, Birmingham City Council, through its Joint Arts, Culture, and Economy Committee, undertook a review of its cultural strategy in 1997. At one of the consultation meetings organised for performing arts organisations as part of this review, the officers' and members' presentation of the strategy focused in detail on the 'flagship' building-based arts organisations, and made only a brief reference to smaller organisations. This caused considerable resentment and frustration amongst those small-scale arts practitioners. It resulted in a strong feeling amongst them that they do not 'have the ear' of the local authority in the same way that the larger, higher-profile institutions do, and that the focus of the City's strategy does not fully reflect the range and significance of activities undertaken by these smaller organisations.

This kind of situation is described and analysed by Maloney et al (1994), where they refer to the "important divide between the relatively few groups with privileged status and the greater number of groups who find themselves consigned to less influential positions" in the consultation process (p.17). As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, such organisations have been termed respectively as 'insider' and 'outsider' groups, with the former divided between those with limited, and those with 'privileged', access. Maloney et al suggest that

a key factor in this distinction is the "resources" which organisations are able to offer government in terms of such things as expertise, information, and credibility. In this light, the large and well-known building-based theatre organisations would have a higher status in the City Council's eyes than the smaller groups with a mainly local profile.

On this issue, an alternative like the model of the Durham *Elements* project does not of course automatically overcome the problem, as there is still the need for a selection of participants and thereby the possible exclusion of some theatre practitioners who might wish to be involved. Indeed, there were, according to the arts development manager co-ordinating the project, other theatre companies interested in participating apart from those already involved in it.[11]

These last two issues – that consultation is seen as a notional gesture, and that only some people are listened to – are key features of policy-making in practice. One aspect of the participatory process referred to by Jeffrey (1997) which is relevant here, is that most, if not all, of the real decision-making is carried out elsewhere other than the place where the consultation is occurring. There is a perception amongst many theatre practitioners that in the policy-making process practitioners are often absent both beforehand, when the consultative document and the parameters of the consultation are being drawn up, and afterwards, when the final document is being revised and the policy constructed.

The first point is not always borne out by my research. In some of the instances studied, practitioners have been engaged in quite early stages of the process. For

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[11] Telephone interview by the author, July 2000.

instance, South West Arts' Issues Paper, 'New Theatre Writing in the South West', which began a period of consultation in January 1997, acknowledges the significant contribution made by practitioners. It is an illuminating indication of the way in which a funder may work with practitioners:

> Work on this paper began with a series of informal consultative meetings with regionally-based writers. This helped to define in more detail the scope of the review, and to identify key issues that would require particular investigation [....]. The advice and guidance we have received has informed and shaped our thinking [....]. It is essential to acknowledge those writers who have made a particular contribution to the development of this paper. Its true authorship is diverse and eclectic. (SWA 1997, Foreword, [p.ii])

The Foreword of the document, in which these comments appear, goes on to explain that a more extensive consultation will follow "to encourage wider debate". South West Arts' tribute to the practitioners' contribution has been echoed elsewhere. For instance Newcastle's arts officer also acknowledged the "generous" contribution made by the participants in the city's process of creating a cultural strategy.[12] It is important therefore to balance the understandable frustration of practitioners over the difficulties and restraints they have experienced, with the more positive experiences that have also occurred.

In many cases where practitioners are involved at an early point in the decision-making process, however, there is still a perception that the representation is not a balanced one, leading to a feeling that there is still exclusion from where the

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[12] Interview by the author, March 1999.

real decisions are made. For instance, the steering group for the Boyden Report was made up of four Arts Council officers, one Arts Council board member, three Regional Arts Board officers, one local authority leisure services director, the director of a festival and five directors of building based theatres. Apart from the festival director, therefore, there were no representatives of any theatre organisations other than building-based ones nor of other venues such as arts centres. Although the original brief of the Boyden team was to investigate repertory theatres, it extended its remit to what it termed the "whole theatre ecology", but its steering group make-up remained the same, and so contributed to the feeling that the opinions of other theatre practitioners were secondary.

The second concern by practitioners – that they are not involved in the decision-making which takes place *after* a period of consultation – is a far more accurate one. To a great extent it is also inevitable, as those responsible for the implementation of the policy must necessarily take the final decisions on it. It is the extent to which those decisions take into account the views expressed during the consultation period that can affect the response of practitioners to the resulting policy. A feeling of alienation is less likely if they can see that a major concern, or a point made by many, has been taken into consideration and has informed the final policy document or report. Certainly, if such views are not incorporated, a clear explanation of why this has not been possible is needed if the consultative process is to retain its credibility.

It is problems and perceptions such as these that have led to the debates and experiments in participative democracy discussed in Chapter 3. Hitherto, these discussions and developments have been little considered in the field of cultural policy research. My study suggests though that aspects of them have, in practice,

been evident, even if not in every case consciously drawing on the models outlined (although they are undoubtedly based on the principles involved). For example, the NAMS debate, South West Arts' new writing policy, the Northern region's New Playwriting Panel, and Durham's *Elements* project all attempted to involve practitioners in contributing to policy development in ways that went beyond conventional consultative processes.

Such initiatives indicate that aspects of the new methods of participative democracy could be usefully applied or adapted in the cultural policy arena. For instance, the approach of deliberative debates, or forums constituted on the lines of citizens' juries, might be able to overcome some of the problems, such as the discounting of some participants' views or the perception that there is a 'pre-set' agenda, which are often apparent in the existing forms of consultation in cultural policy. At the same time it is important to recognise that these are not a panacea, and the unresolved difficulties in relation to these innovations, such as the selection of participants or the time involved in taking part in policy activity, need to be kept in mind.

While the perception of consultation has frequently had these negative connotations amongst those seeking to influence the policy making process, the concepts of 'insider' and 'outsider' groups, as described earlier, may offer a framework for distinguishing and developing an approach which can be more beneficial to arts practitioners. As set out by Grant (1978), the insider/outsider formulation refers to both the conferring of status by government *and* the strategies adopted by organisations in their dealings with government. It is the latter that could be of particular importance to arts practitioners and that has been

evident in the way theatre practitioners have approached their involvement in the development of playwriting policy.

A point that needs considering here is that both Grant and Maloney et al are making reference primarily to government, as the body which groups are aiming to influence. Theatre practitioners, however, wish to affect arts funders as well, and these, within the English system, operate at 'arm's length' from government and are thus described (e.g. Gray 1994) as quangos. Grant (1978) has a brief but interesting discussion about the relevance of the insider/outsider concept in relation to quangos. He argues that although groups may find they are able to develop closer relationships with some quangos, "the sympathy of such agencies is of little value if their views are not heeded by the central government. Indeed it may be argued that one of the functions of such agencies is to create a kind of phoney "insider" status for some groups in order to reassure them" (p.4). He therefore concludes that access to quangos is "not an indicator of genuine insider status" (ibid.).

Although Grant's point may well be accurate in relation to some, indeed many, quangos, it is not applicable to the arts funding system. As outlined in Chapter 4, all the artform policies and the funding schemes are under the auspices of the Arts Council and the Regional Arts Boards, and therefore if theatre practitioners wish to influence these policies they need to be developing a relationship with the quangos. Only broad questions of policy and the size of the Treasury grant are decisions which require influence at central government level.

Grant, then, suggests that the way in which groups may affect the policy-making process is, in part, the result of decisions they themselves make about the

strategies they pursue in their dealings with those they are seeking to influence. Maloney et al specifically argue against the idea that the difference between insider and outsider groups is *only* the result of government decision, but consider the strategies chosen by groups are of less significance than the resources (of expertise, information, etc.) that those groups have to offer to government. However, my research demonstrates that strategies and resources are closely intertwined, in that groups can choose strategies which have the effect of increasing their resources. Thus, arts practitioners can enhance their capacity to offer knowledge and information to those they wish to influence, and take actions to raise their profile, and so make themselves more necessary to the consultation process. As this thesis has shown, such actions are particularly evident in the way playwrights have set up their own organisations in the latter part of the twentieth century.

6.2 Uninvited Policy Interventions

While theatre practitioners have thus been offered these official opportunities for involvement in the policy process, they have also frequently created their own channels through which to influence policy. In situations where a crisis arises to which a response is required, or where a long-term problem does not appear to be tackled, both playwrights and theatre companies have taken the initiative, employing a variety of means in order to have an effect on existing policies or to create new ones. In addition to these engagements with the public policy process, playwrights' organisations have also, as we have seen, focused on the policies of the theatre companies (who, although not public bodies, are publicly subsidised and therefore closely linked to questions of public policy).

These interventions, of playwrights and theatres, can thus be categorised as 'uninvited', in that they are outside the formal channels of consultation; although some of these attempts have led to positive responses from funders and, as a result, to co-operation between funders and practitioners.

6.2.1 Playwrights' Organisations: A Deliberate Attempt to Influence Policy and Practice

This thesis has emphasised that one of the significant features of developments in the field of new theatre writing is the extent to which playwrights have organised themselves to represent their interests and to raise the profile and production of new plays. A significant feature of their intent and activities has been their aim to have an effect on new writing policy: both the policies of the arts funders, and those of theatres and their managements. Their concern has also been to ensure that those policies are implemented.

The methods used by the playwrights' organisations to influence policy and its implementation have included direct lobbying and campaigning, negotiations with theatre managements, the organisation of conferences and other events, presentation of research and information, and showcasing of new plays. They have also explored alternative ways of supporting playwrights, developing scripts, and increasing the production of new work, in a range of joint projects with theatre companies: for example, the 'seeding' schemes of bodies like North West Playwrights, Stagecoach!, and New Writing North.

The wide range of approaches adopted within the playwrights' organisations can be seen, for instance, in the work of the New Playwrights' Trust Writernet. When

it was formed in 1985 its aims included raising the profile and status of new writing. To this end it has undertaken research and held conferences on different aspects of theatre writing, which have helped to raise discussion of issues facing writers, while also providing much-needed information to aspiring playwrights. Such projects have included conferences on literary management and the role of the critic; and research and publications on opportunities for black, Asian, and disabled writers. NPT/WriterNet has frequently made an input into national policy deliberations, contributing for example to the Arts Council's consultations on the National Arts and Media Strategy in 1991, the Green Paper on Drama in 1995, the new Lottery programme in 1996, and the theatre writing strategy in 1999. It regards itself very much as "a strategic body for the sector", carrying out an advocacy role.[13] It has also worked closely with other organisations concerned with new playwriting, including collaborating with other playwrights' organisations in trying to influence policy.

When TWU was set up in the mid-1970s, it described itself as "a voice for playwrights",[14] and "a pressure group [...] principally directed against the Arts Council". [15] It marked its achievements then in terms of changes secured in the Arts Council's new writing schemes. This role in policy change continued to form a significant part of the union's purpose. For example, in its contribution to the Arts Council's National Arts and Media Strategy consultation, TWU expressed its desire for "practical involvement in strategic decision-making affecting the arts in this country. We want to be involved directly, at the beginning and at every stage of the process."[16]

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[13] New Playwrights Trust, internal document, [n.d.], [p.2].
[14] Theatre Writers' Union, *Press release*, 1st January 1976.
[15] Theatre Writers' Union, *The Case for the Theatre Writers' Union*, [n.d].
[16] Theatre Writers Union, *Newsletter*, Winter 1991/2, p.6.

TWU's campaign for a 'dead writers' levy' was very much a part of its attempts to influence policy, focusing more broadly than its pressure on existing Arts Council schemes or its direct contract negotiations with theatre managers. It was an attempt to change significantly the arena of new playwriting, having a bearing on arts funders, theatres, playwrights, and audiences. Furthermore, with a view to maximising its impact, TWU broadened out its initiative to involve the Writers' Guild as well, jointly submitting the proposal as a contribution to the Arts Council's review of drama policy in 1995.

TWU's focus was also on the theatre companies, and its negotiations for standard contracts represented a large part of their, and other writers' organisations', efforts to change the policy and practice of theatres towards both new writing and writers. These contract agreements covered the national theatres, repertory theatres, and small-scale and touring companies, as TWU attempted to ensure that playwrights would be protected whichever company they were writing for. In addition to the contract negotiations, TWU produced reports on the situation of new writing; held meetings, conferences, and debates; and tried to pressure, cajole, and encourage theatre companies to improve their treatment of writers and to produce more new plays.

The letter sent to the Guardian in 1994 by eighty-six playwrights is an example of these attempts to affect theatres' policies on the presentation of new plays. The letter expressed concern about the under-representation of new plays and urged theatres to increase the number they produced, suggesting very specific targets in terms of plays and performances ("at least three new plays in your theatre per

year [...]. They must be full scale productions and entail at least 18 performances").[17]

At a regional level too, playwrights have sought to influence policy and practice. When North West Playwrights was set up in 1982 it was particularly in response to a situation in which almost no new plays were being produced in the region's theatres, and its publicity and reports in subsequent years frequently referred to that fact, and to its perception that it had made a difference to the proportion of new repertoire presented in the region. The other regional playwrights' associations have also included in their brief the aim of increasing the proportion of new plays performed in their local theatres, and of raising the profile of new theatre writing. Both explicitly and implicitly, there is an aim of influencing the policies of theatres and of funders – for theatres to put on more new plays, and for funders to provide the funding and support to make it possible.

An example of this dual approach can be found in the activities of TWU's West Midlands branch, which in 1986 produced a code of practice for regional theatres funded by the RAB. The code, covering rates of payment, paid attendance at rehearsals, involvement in choice of artistic team for their play's production, and rights over the play text itself, was agreed with West Midlands Arts. The branch was thus attempting to influence the policy and practice of both the RAB and the theatres, and regarded the achievement of the arts board's agreement as a significant advance: "we are the only branch in the country to have achieved such a Code".[18] Although disappointment was later expressed that it did not appear

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[17] 'Playwrights demand more time in the theatres for new work', The Guardian, 21st November 1994, p21.
[18] Internal letter, 3rd March 1986.

that WMA was sufficiently monitoring theatres' compliance with the code, the branch continued to press for its application.

The close involvement of playwrights in the development of South West Arts' writing policy was also a result of the activity of the regional TWU branch and Writers' Guild members in the region. In previous years they had organised events, such as a writers' symposium, and contributed to SWA's consultative meeting on the Arts Council's 1995 drama review. When SWA decided in 1996 to cease funding the Orchard Theatre, one of the few theatres in the South West regularly producing new plays by writers not 'in house', the TWU branch and WGGB wrote to protest and organised a meeting of twenty-five writers, attended by Nick Capaldi, South West Arts' Director of Performing Arts. His response was positive, and encouraged further meetings and correspondence to develop ideas for new writing policy in the region, to feed into the process begun by SWA. A report on the events by one of those involved described it as "an ace example of writers' solidarity and determined action paying off",[19] which echoes the comments in SWA's resulting 'Issues Paper' cited above.

Other activities aimed at affecting policy at a regional and local level include surveys of the position of new playwriting in regional theatres, carried out by several of the regional writers' groups; and joint new writing projects between playwrights' groups and regional theatres such as those developed by West Midlands TWU with Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Belgrade Theatre Coventry.

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[19] Olwen Wymark, Chair Theatre Committee WGGB, 'Meeting Exeter 9/11/96 Writers from WGGB and TWU with Southwest Arts', [n.d], p.2.

Another of the activities used by playwrights' organisations to influence policy is the showcasing of new work. Yorkshire Playwrights for example has put on readings by professional actors of local playwrights' work-in-progress, North West Playwrights presents script-in-hand performances of new plays for invited audiences; and for some years Stagecoach! ran an annual festival of new plays. The presentation of this work acts as a form of advocacy, maintaining awareness of new writers and new theatre writing itself amongst those who have a role in theatre organisation and funding. Events at which new work is presented in this way also serve the purpose of bringing together a range of people concerned with new writing for the theatre, including theatre directors and funders as well as playwrights. They thus help to strengthen the links among those concerned with new playwriting. Some of the playwrights' associations also provide funding for theatre companies to commission or develop new plays; an activity which, as well as providing much-needed support to writers and companies, further helps to develop the profile of new writing for the theatre.

The playwrights' associations also attempt to develop their influence through structural means, in the way that they run their organisations. For example, Stagecoach!, North West Playwrights, and New Writing North all have theatre directors on their boards, which means that they have working contact with the people most able to commission and produce new plays, and can therefore act as a conduit between local playwrights and theatres. They can also draw the directors into a clearer understanding of the needs of the playwrights in their locality, and engage them in a dialogue about new theatre writing. These outcomes have not always been achieved. As already mentioned, there was a period in the late 1990s when North West Playwrights felt that it was unsuccessful in promoting new writers among most of the theatres in the region

because, despite the presence of theatre directors on its board, it was not managing to engage enough regional directors in the development and showcasing work of the organisation. However, when working well, these kinds of connections can help to develop theatres' awareness not only of the existence and skills of local writers but also of the potential for increasing both the proportion of new plays in the repertoire and interest in new writing in the region.

There is a common perception that influences on policy, whether formal or informal, take the form only of discussions about policy itself, through direct verbal or written input into policy-making. As indicated in the paragraphs above, some of the other activities of the playwrights' groups, apart from their submissions to policy discussions or their publication of research, have an influence through maintaining an awareness of the potential for new writing and the need for consistent support for it. For example, the chairman of Stagecoach!, when asked about his assessment of the organisation's influence on policy in the region, said he felt that Stagecoach! had certainly influenced theatres, and had helped to "change the climate" in the West Midlands region, and that this had been achieved largely through their *work* being influential, rather than as a direct input into policy-making.[20] Similarly, one of North West Playwrights' Co-Directors felt that the work of NWP stimulated theatres to develop work on new writing, and made it possible for them to do so by providing them with extra resources and input.[21]

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[20] Interview by the author, June 1999.
[21] Conversation with the author, July 2003.

6.2.2 Theatre Companies Influencing Policy

Although the main focus of this section on deliberate, and therefore frequently unsolicited, attempts to influence policy has been on the playwrights' organisations, theatre companies and their management associations have also taken initiatives to try to have an effect on policy formation. These have included meetings with funders and campaigning events.

For example, in 1984 and 1985 the Theatrical Management Association (TMA) took part together with writers' organisations in discussions over the Arts Council's theatre writing schemes. Minutes and letters written on behalf of the joint TMA/writers' working party to the Arts Council betray a degree of frustration: "the Chairman reported that Mr Rittner had not responded to the joint request for a meeting, and Mr Adams agreed to write again [...] objecting to being ignored";[22] "we are somewhat nonplussed to gather from your letter that there has been a major consideration of the system of subsidy for new writing when representatives of the managers and the writers do not appear to have been consulted".[23] However, progress was eventually made. According to the minutes of one of the meetings between TMA and the writers, the TMA was of the view that "the Arts Council had changed its views on funding due to the lobbying of various bodies including the TMA/Writers Joint Working Party".[24]

Theatre companies have also been involved in campaigning and lobbying events. As recounted in Chapter 4, theatre directors organised a protest in 1985 in response to the Arts Council's *Glory of the Garden* proposals, including its

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[22] Minutes of TMA Writers Committee with Writers' Unions, 2nd July 1984.
[23] Letter from Joint Working Party, 20th July 1984.
[24] 'TMA Minutes of meeting of the Writers' Committee with the Writers', 19th November 1985, p.2.

effects on the production of new plays. In 1994 theatre companies also took part in a campaign against the government's proposed cut in the Arts Council's grant, a campaign that included the gathering of signatures to a petition, the lobbying of MPs, and a rally chaired by theatre director Philip Hedley.

We have seen in the previous section that playwrights' organisations can influence policy through their activities, as well as by direct policy engagement. Paralleling this, there are also instances in my research which suggest that the example of practice by theatres can sometimes be aimed at affecting the development of particular policies. An example of this kind of intention can be found in the work of Coventry Theatre Network (CTN), a grouping consisting of seven small-scale theatre companies collaborating together with its local repertory theatre, the Belgrade Theatre. One of its aims, as outlined in its application to the National Lottery (the successful outcome of which provided the funding for CTN to carry out its programme for three years) was to "feed information about the Coventry Project to West Midlands Arts, The Arts Council and Coventry City Council to both inform and develop new drama strategies".[25] In other words, one of the goals of the project was to provide a model of collaborative practice among a group of theatre companies that could be adopted by others, and become incorporated into wider theatre policies. This aim was reiterated when the project was well underway three years later, by the associate producer of the Belgrade Theatre; and she referred to discussions which had taken place with the Arts Council as to how CTN's findings might fit into a wider discussion on theatre policy.[26]

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[25] Coventry Theatre Network, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, Arts 4 Everyone Lottery application, 1997, section 3.4 of application form.
[26] Interview by the author, May 2000.

6.3 Networks of Policy and Practice

Although the discussion has so far focused on the organisations of theatre practitioners mainly as separate entities, it should be clear by now that these different bodies also frequently work together. This observation is in accordance with the view of policy theorists Richard H. Hall and Robert E. Quinn (1983) that "public policy is embedded in series of interorganizational networks [...] Analyses of public policy miss the mark if the focus is on single organizations" (p.13). This section of the chapter examines these links in the field of playwriting policy, and their bearing on practitioners' involvement in policy activity, in more depth. It argues that these interactions help to make the organisations more 'resource-rich', and thus to increase their opportunities for participation.

As we have seen, playwrights' organisations, theatre companies, and arts funders are the principal agents involved with the development of new writing for the theatre in England. It is evident that, even though each body pursues its own goals, there are also many links and contacts which connect them together to form complex, and often dynamic, networks. A range of formal and informal structures and arrangements exists. Contacts, collaborations, forums, consultations and discussions take place to varying degrees and alter over time. Although there are variations among the different localities and regions, the connections amongst these different actors also share many similarities.[27]

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[27] It should be noted that other agents also play a role: these include theatre critics, educators in playwriting, and publishers of play scripts. They are also involved in the networks of people and organisations concerned with new playwriting and play a part in discussions about policy. Some of their involvement has already been mentioned and is further referred to briefly in this chapter.

These networks are considered here not only in order to describe more fully the operations of theatre practitioners in policy formation and implementation, but also because it is my argument that it is within such networks that the channels of communication and influence can more easily be opened and maintained to allow the participation of practitioners in the creation of policy. This proposition accords with the emphasis placed by Edella Schlager (1995) on "reciprocity" and "repeated interaction" as necessary ingredients in networks or what she terms coalitions (p.249), and which enable those coalitions to "take their rightful place in the policy process" (p.248).

The next section of this chapter therefore investigates these connections amongst the bodies concerned with new writing, looking at the forms they take and the circumstances in which they operate, and drawing out conclusions. It makes the argument that the playwriting networks cross the boundaries of policy and creative practice, with links being made among practitioners and funders that weave together both creative collaborations and policy activity. Before examining the substance of these networks though it is useful to consider the meaning of the term itself, and some of the ways in which it is used and is broken down into more specific definitions that may be relevant.

6.3.1 The Concepts of Network and Other Informal Groupings

In its general everyday usage the term 'network' refers to a (usually loose and fluid) system of relationships amongst people and organisations; or, as reflected in the dictionary definition of the word, "an interconnected group of people" (OED). It is in these senses that it is often used by authors and commentators to describe informal systems of connections amongst people and organisations. The

term is used, for instance, by Howard S. Becker (1982) in his influential study of the collaborative links and conventions that make up the 'art worlds' of artistic activity with which he is concerned (e.g. pp.87, 369-371). He employs it particularly to emphasise the social aspect of artistic creation, referring to "networks of people acting together" (p.369), and "networks [of] cooperative activity" (p.370).

'Network' is also the concept used by political scientists to refer to the relationships amongst people and organisations concerned with a particular area of policy. Hal G. Rainey and H. Brinton Milward, for example, refer to the "network of individuals, groups, and organizations at different levels of government, and in both public and private sectors, that act together in the formation and implementation of policy in particular policy areas" (1983, p.140). The general term used by such writers is 'policy network', but they also distinguish different types to aid their analysis of these relationships (Gray, 1994 and 2000; Colebatch, 2002). Of relevance for this discussion is the 'issue network', which can be very specific with a focus on one element in a policy area, and can be used to describe a community of specialists (Colebatch, p.45). Although Clive Gray argues that those involved in arts policy do not provide "a 'pure' example of the issue network idea" (Gray 2000, p.94), nevertheless, in the respects outlined by H. K. Colebatch, the issue network does seem to provide an appropriate description of the connections among the organisations and individuals concerned with new playwriting policy.

There is also a strand of sociological research that has developed analysis of informal groupings – what Samuel Gilmore (1988) refers to as "open interactional systems" (p.204) – in order to distinguish particular types within

them. These different terms include the 'social circle' (Kadushin, 1976), 'solidarity groups' (Crane, 1972), and 'schools of activity' (Gilmore). They describe forms of organisation, communication, and collaboration among people involved in a common activity or with a common interest. Some aspects of these analytical definitions are relevant to this study.

The concept of the 'social circle' is used to define a form of informal organisation whose key characteristics include that its boundaries are unclear, it contains key figures but not formal leaders, nor does it have a formal constitution. These features fit with the ways in which playwriting networks operate.

Diana Crane's definition of 'solidarity' groups (Crane, p.139) refers to groupings in which members share interests and provide support and encouragement to each other; and in so doing throws light on the ways in which organisations concerned with theatre writing have supported each other. For example, the national playwriting network, made up of regional playwrights organisations and co-ordinated by the New Playwrights Trust/Writernet, has held joint meetings and encouraged contact amongst the groups; and this support and collaboration has been greatly valued by its members.

Gilmore's idea of the 'school of activity' refers specifically to artists collaborating together where they share an aesthetic interest. He places it within Becker's concept of 'art world': "the social arena in which collaborative artistic activity takes place", and where the emphasis is on the organisation of activities rather than of people (Gilmore 1988, p.205). Schools, though, operate on a smaller scale than whole art worlds, referring to "more specific artistic identities"

(p.206). Gilmore distinguishes schools of activity from schools of thought, where the latter are a means of externally classifying artists and their products (e.g. by critics or scholars). By contrast, a key aspect of schools of activity is that they are "constructed through the interaction and exchange of artistic work by artistic collaborators. [They] are actual social groups [...] and are used to help organize collaborative activity" (pp.2070208). The term is thus applicable to some aspects of the connections among those concerned with new theatre writing; for although much of the focus of the playwriting networks is with policy and the working conditions of writers, they also include artistic collaborations, particularly at the regional level.

Furthermore, Gilmore emphasises the strength of shared artistic identity that is created amongst the participants in a school of activity. Such an interpretation thus provides another dimension to an understanding of the connections amongst those involved in developing new writing for the theatre: for example, it helps to explain why many participants attached great value to the annual theatre conferences organised by the Birmingham MA in Playwriting Studies course (cf. below). These conferences brought together a very wide range of actors connected to new theatre writing, and were seen by those attending as both intellectually stimulating and an important opportunity to keep in contact with others working in the same arena. The idea of the school of activity, with its strong shared identity, may also help to explain the tenacity with which those involved in new playwriting have attempted to raise its profile and to influence policy in the field.

Thus some aspects of these analytic typologies can help to illuminate features of the playwriting networks. Nevertheless, the following sections continue to use

the broader term of 'network' to embrace the variety of links and relationships among those involved in the field. For as well as covering the features of the specific analytic terms discussed above, it can also be employed in its looser form, meaning 'connections amongst people', and referring to an interconnectedness which has some degree of structure in it but not a formal one. This usage is also linked to the discussion of governance, where a range of organisations, including government bodies, are "increasingly networked into sets of relationships" (Wilson 1998, p.101).

In conclusion, the term 'network' is employed here to describe the range of links amongst the various organisations concerned with new writing in the theatre, while bearing in mind the usefulness of some of the other terms in highlighting specific aspects of those connections. The next section of this chapter investigates these links in more detail, exploring the 'texture' of this network in order to provide further insight into the policy-making process in new theatre writing.

6.3.2 The Complex Structure of the Networks

A key feature of the playwriting networks is their complexity, which manifests itself in two particular ways. One of these is that there are many networks within the field, operating at different levels and often overlapping. Thus, local, regional, and national networks exist and interact with each other. The other feature is that these different networks operate in a variety of modes.

Both of these aspects can best be illustrated by looking in detail at one specific region, and for this purpose the example of the West Midlands, where a large number of organisations have been involved in new theatre writing, is presented.

In addition to the regional writers' organisation, Stagecoach! (now Script), there are a number of local playwrights' groups;[28] several of the region's theatre companies have a strong interest in new writing, and the region is also home to the first, and best-known, postgraduate course for playwrights – the MA in Playwriting Studies (MAPS) at Birmingham University.[29]

The lines of contact criss-cross amongst all these organisations: from local playwrights' groups to the theatre in their locality; between different theatre companies; amongst MAPS, Stagecoach! and the theatres; between local authorities and writers' organisations. The contacts range from formal to informal, regular to occasional, from one-off to long-term. Indeed, 'partnership' and similar terms are constantly recurring words in the various documents produced by organisations involved in supporting and developing new theatre writing. Statements such as "it is partnership which is at the heart of our approach" (West Midlands Arts Annual Report 1996-97, p.25); the strap-line to Stagecoach!'s logo for a number of years: "a creative partnership between playwrights and theatre companies"; and even the title of the Worcester Swan Theatre's three-year plan for 1999 to 2002, *Creative Connections*, illustrate the extent to which relationships with other bodies are a continuing theme in the plans of many of these organisations.

In short, there appears to be a widespread recognition by the various bodies involved in new theatre writing that connections and partnerships should be

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[28] At the end of 2000, for example, there were three groups in Birmingham, two each in Coventry, Worcester, and Hereford, and one each in Stratford, Wolverhampton, and Shropshire.

[29] Set up in 1989 by the dramatist David Edgar, it is taught by practising playwrights. The course is based on "the conviction that there are techniques, devices and principles that govern dramatic structure", which writers can learn about (David Edgar, 'A play wot I wrote', *Guardian*, 13th July 1994). It combines theoretical work with the students' own playwriting, including live performance of the students' work.

central to their work and to the way they play their part in the field. These intentions and claims are not always, of course, borne out in practice; but they are nevertheless a significant part of the environment in which the various organisations concerned with new playwriting are involved, and bear out the observation that with the development of the idea of governance "partnerships have become the order of the day" (Wilson 1992, p.101).

These connections amongst the different organisations are of four main types. Firstly, they take the form of active partnerships, involving collaborations, exchanges of information, and support for each other's activities. Secondly, there are the informal links and relationships which run alongside these more structured collaborations. Thirdly, there are contacts at the level of explicit policy-making, both 'invited' and 'uninvited'; and fourthly, the official relations between arts funders and their clients.

Looking at these relationships in the context of the West Midlands, in the first category of active partnerships there is a wide variety of activities and relationships, both long-term and one-off, concentrated and intermittent. Such partnerships can take the form of a focused collaboration between two or more partners over a substantial period of time, such as a co-production in 1999 by the Worcester Swan Theatre and the Belgrade Theatre of regional writer Alex Jones's *Phil & Jill & Jill & Phil* – a play which had been developed through workshops put on by Stagecoach!

At the other end of the scale there are one-off events involving collaboration. In October 1999 for instance, six theatres and three arts centres in the West Midlands hosted Stagecoach!'s writing workshops, and eight local authorities

offered funding to provide bursaries to participants who could not afford the fee. But although each of these workshops was a 'one-off', several theatres have hosted, and some of the local authorities have funded, such workshops over a number of years, thus developing a relationship with Stagecoach! which is long-term, although also intermittent. Similarly, the MAPS course provided for several years a series of monthly seminars which brought together writers and other theatre practitioners in the region, mostly discussing the craft and experience of theatre writing. Its annual showcase of students' plays was also open to other practitioners in the region to attend.

Other connections are virtually continuous. For instance, the Swan Playwrights group was established by the Worcester Swan Theatre in 1994, and although the group became autonomous it continued to meet at the theatre and to hold events there. At the same time, the theatre drew on the group's writers for some of its new plays: for example, a collaboration took place between the theatre and four playwrights from the group over two years, from 1999, to produce a series of plays for the new millennium. This relationship continued until the theatre's closure in 2003.

Secondly, in addition to all these organised forms of contact, there are the unorganised, spontaneous, and informal links and relationships which proceed alongside them. Conversations in the intervals and at the edges of organised events; telephone calls amongst the different actors in the field with queries or information; visits to the productions of other practitioners and subsequent discussions of their work: these all take place continuously, and undoubtedly help to cement the more structured connections and collaborations.

Other contacts are developed at the level of policy-making, and this is the third main type of connection amongst organisations. It includes both formal consultations on arts strategy and specific cultural issues that have been undertaken by West Midlands Arts and the local authorities in the region, and the policy initiatives of theatre practitioners. The formal reviews – 'invited' policy involvement – have included new theatre writing either as a component of a broader-ranging discussion or as a specifically focused one. For instance, as part of the Boyden Theatre Review, WMA's Drama Officer organised a meeting of representatives from regional theatre companies with a commitment to new writing, specifically to give them the opportunity to make an input into the review on this issue.

The 'uninvited' initiatives by theatre practitioners at the level of policy have also provided opportunities for the different components of the regional network to engage in discussion together. For example, when Stagecoach! ran its first new writing festival in 1992 it adopted "several strategies [...] in order to achieve a greater programming of local new work".[30] These included the organisation of public discussions, and a final plenary session for writers, directors, and actors, with speakers from the Arts Council, the RAB, and North West Playwrights. In succeeding years Stagecoach! organised further policy-oriented discussions, either as part of its annual new writing festival or as a conference, such as *Playwriting – Dead or Alive?* in July 2000 and *Writing Onwards: Finding and Developing New Playwrights* in May 2001.

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[30] Stagecoach! Organising Committee, *Report of Stagecoach! 1992*, p.3 (West Midlands TWU, June 1992).

Finally, other forms of contact among the various actors in the field include what might be termed the official relations between arts funders and their clients, such as grant reviews, appraisals, and the regular reporting required of funded theatres and companies. Funders are also able to have an observer on their clients' boards, thus being able to make an input into board discussions. These more official relations also include arrangements to provide information to theatre practitioners. For example, in September 1999, in conjunction with East Midlands Arts, WMA arranged a meeting of producing theatres (both building-based and touring) from the two regions in order to discuss the Arts Council's National Theatre Writing Strategy with the Council's New Writing Officer.

It can be seen that these different forms of interaction in the West Midlands operate at several levels, which frequently overlap. Local groupings intersect with regional ones, which in turn have national connections. Thus, Stagecoach! has links with local groups such as those in Wolverhampton and Stratford that it helped to set up, whilst also interacting with other regional and national organisations, for example through its participation in the national network of playwrights' organisations co-ordinated by NPT. At the same time, Stagecoach!'s conferences, mentioned above, have been attended by practitioners and others concerned with new playwriting from across the country.

Similarly, the MAPS course's local activities and connections were complemented for several years by its organisation of a major annual conference in Birmingham open to all those involved with theatre writing, both regionally and nationally. Writers, directors, literary managers, actors, critics, play publishers, journal editors, theatre administrators, co-ordinators of playwrights'

organisations all took part in a weekend of intense discussion of a wide range of topics related to theatre writing.

Theatres in the West Midlands are also involved in wider networks, in addition to their links with writers' groups and other agencies in the region. For example, many small-scale theatres are members of their management association, the Independent Theatre Council, and through this meet up both regionally and nationally to discuss shared concerns.

Together, this wide range of links, relationships, contacts, collaborations, and exchanges makes up the fabric of the network of policy and practice involved with new writing for the theatre in the West Midlands. Similar networks exist in other regions and are replicated at a national level.

We have already seen examples of these connections: for instance, TWU and the Writers' Guild together presenting the idea of a 'dead writers' levy', North West Playwrights having theatre directors on its board and working on joint projects with regional theatre companies, Northern Playwrights' co-operation with Northern Arts in administering awards to writers, NPT's co-ordination of a national network of regional playwrights' organisations, the international links of Yorkshire Playwrights and TWU.

Other examples include the Arts Council's Theatre Writing Officer providing statistical information to the playwrights' organisations for the latter's reports and campaigns in the 1990s, and its Drama Director being guest speaker at TWU's AGM in May 1996; the role of journals like *(New) Theatre Quarterly* and

Gambit in keeping theatre practitioners "up to date with new ideas and plays"[31] and providing a "platform for serious theatrical discussion"[32]; meetings at various times of playwrights' organisations with the Directors' Guild, Society of Authors, and Equity. When the eighty-six playwrights sent their letter to the *Guardian* in 1994, it was followed up the next day with an article by Michael Billington, the newspaper's theatre critic, supporting their demand for more new plays to be produced. The sub-heading of the article encapsulates the sense of the network conceptually, and of the wider – not just sectional – interest involved, as it suggests that "everyone in the theatre should share the anger of our playwrights".[33]

A key point to make is that, as my research has demonstrated, this web of connections amongst organisations concerned with new playwriting is frequently manifested in active creative partnerships. At the same time, though, these same organisations are involved in a variety of policy initiatives. Their partnerships thus cross the boundaries of policy and creative practice, weaving together policy activity with artistic collaborations, with each of the two strands informing the other.

Firstly, the fact that individuals and organisations have worked together creatively – along the lines of the aesthetic interactions and exchanges of Gilmore's 'schools of activity' – means that there are shared interests and understandings when they are involved in policy deliberations. Secondly, the creative activities feed into and influence policy, while policy discussions can

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[31] John Calder, Editorial, *Gambit*, Vol.7, No.28, 1976, p.3.
[32] Irving Wardle, Editorial, *Gambit*, Vol.5, No.17, 1970, p.3.
[33] Michael Billington, '87 deadly sins', *Guardian*, 22nd November 1994,G2, p.5.

lead to artistic collaboration. For example, the West Midlands branch of TWU was involved in the early 1990s in a scheme with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre whereby members of the union could bring their plays to monthly meetings with the theatre's directors for reading and discussion. This was of course a creative collaboration; but at the same time the branch was aiming to achieve a higher proportion of new plays produced at the theatre, thus seeking to influence the theatre's policy. Similarly, although almost in reverse, a meeting in 1991 between the West Midlands TWU branch and the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, to discuss the theatre's policy towards new playwriting, led to a range of joint creative activities including script-reading, workshops, and the setting up of a local playwrights' group. These artistic activities then influenced policy in their turn: the Belgrade invited feedback from the writers in order to help "shape and develop this initiative in partnership",[34] and TWU noted the potential of the collaboration to "raise the profile and importance of new writing in all its theatrical forms".[35]

There is thus a close link between the existence of active, collaborative networks and the capacity of theatre practitioners to make an input into policy development and implementation. This finding bears out Schlager's view that "reciprocity promotes trust and repeated interaction permits individuals to better learn about their situation, and each other" (1995, p.249). She goes on: "Repeated interaction [...] also provides a context in which individuals can change or shape each other's preferences", and especially "permits the changing and shaping of preferences of important decision makers" (p.262). If this is indeed the case, one would conversely expect a lesser or more fractured input

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[34] Circular letter from Belgrade Theatre, 'Belgrade Regional Writers Workshops', [1991], p.2.
[35] TWU *Newsletter West Midlands*, September 1991, p.1.

into policy if networks are not so well developed. Certainly, while some other regions, and the national picture, manifest similarly active networks, others have much weaker ones.

In some areas there are no associations of playwrights at a regional level at all, leading to a lack of connection between writers and theatres, and between writers and RABs; in some, links between theatre companies and the RAB are not so strong. Such weaknesses and tensions are referred to in the Boyden Report: "Although many reps have developed strong mutually supportive relationships with their RABs, in some places the legacy of distrust which accompanied the process of devolution continues to cast a shadow" (2000b, p.12). This particular effect of devolution was earlier noted by Nobuko Kawashima, although she also points out that in some cases devolution brought theatres together regionally to a greater extent than had existed before (1996, pp.38-40).

There are a number of reasons for suspicion, coolness, or just an absence of relationship amongst the organisations concerned with theatre writing. Protectiveness, competition, workload, and insularity all play a part in weakening or disrupting the links among the different actors. Difference in outlook, as was the case with Yorkshire Playwrights and its RAB over the question of writer development and play production (discussed in Chapter 4), may also cause tensions or limit communication. In this case relations between the RAB and the playwrights became strained; and during my research in the region I found that some other links among theatre organisations in the region were not very active. The extent to which this occurs varies from region to region, and may also change over time.

It is in these changes over time that the differing effects of strong or weak networks can particularly be discerned.

6.3.3 The Changing Nature of the Networks

Another aspect to be considered then is that these networks are constantly shifting and evolving. Players in them come and go, influences grow and subside, relationships are forged and then fade. Thus, the differences between regions noted above do not represent a static picture, but rather one where those differences are a 'snapshot' of the situation at the time. Such alterations in the life of individual organisations and in the networks of which they are part shed light on the argument that the strength of the networks, and the involvement of the various players, affects the ability of organisations to have an influence within them, including on policy development.

Developments in the Northern region provide an illustration of the way in which organisations, and thus the dynamics of a network, change over time. As described earlier, this region was the first in England to give birth to a playwrights' organisation. Northern Playwrights Society was established in 1974, and developed as a key organisation in the region, becoming responsible for awarding new writing commissions through a grant from the RAB. However, changes in the organisation of theatre provision in the region, the increasing workload which caused a burden on the very limited staffing of the Society, as well as the difficulty of responding consistently as a membership body taking its decisions at monthly open meetings, all meant that NPS was unable to continue its role as a funding body.

Responding to the changed situation, it took the decision, together with the Regional Arts Board, to establish the New Playwriting Panel – a body consisting of writers, directors, and representatives of both Northern Playwrights and Northern Arts – which met four times a year to make grants for new writing commissions. However, by 1996 further changes had taken place, resulting in the creation of New Writing North, an agency to support new writing in all media. This now became the main recipient of Northern Arts funding, and administered the New Playwriting Panel.

As a result, the purpose of Northern Playwrights changed. It continued to be a membership organisation, but saw its role as primarily the support and development of *new* playwrights, and to this end set up branches around the region. With a change in its purpose also came an alteration in its influence. It was no longer the key organisation of writers consulted by bodies such as the RAB – this role was now fulfilled by New Writing North, an organisation which had an office and a full-time director. In 2000 members of the Society felt they were unable to continue to manage the organisation and decided to dissolve it. The groups it had set up in North and South Cumbria continued, with support from New Writing North and later, due to Arts Council regional boundary changes, support from North West Playwrights.

Thus, the changes which took place in one organisation, the Northern Playwrights' Society, were both influenced by, and in turn affected, the other actors in the network of bodies concerned with new playwriting in the northern region. More than this, the loss of the Society's key active role reduced the weight they had carried in influencing policy. The secretary of the Society felt

that the loss of funding had also weakened their relationships with other playwrights' organisations across the country.[36]

A less formal organisation, the West Midlands Theatre Forum, provides a further illustration of the way in which bodies may have a frequently changing life, and how this both affects and can be affected by, the wider network of which it is part. The Forum was established as a meeting of both small- and large-scale theatre companies in the region (although the larger theatres tended not to attend), and met on a regular basis, before falling into inactivity. At the end of 1997 it was revived by some of its former members, and over the next year held bi-monthly meetings where information was exchanged, discussions held, and work of the member companies showcased. During the next two years there were sporadic attempts to re-establish the Forum, consisting of occasional meetings, but no continuing organisation. A parallel attempt to set up a Birmingham theatre forum was similarly unsuccessful. As a result of these interrupted forms of organisation, connections among the smaller theatre companies have remained tenuous and haphazard.

The disintegration of the West Midlands Theatre Forum also had an impact on the wider theatre network in the region. In his annual reports in 1997 and 1998 the Chairman of Stagecoach! stated that "the collapse of the West Midlands Theatre Forum has temporarily weakened our links with non-building-based companies",[37] and explained that, as a result, these links had to be "progressed slowly on an individual basis".[38] Moreover, there is some feeling among the

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[36] Interview by the author, March 1999.
[37] Stagecoach!, 'Chair's report 1996-1997', p.2.
[38] Stagecoach!, 'Chair's report 1997-1998', p.2.

smaller theatre companies in Birmingham that their lack of influence on the City Council's policy for theatre in the City has not been helped by their inability to maintain their own network through bodies such as the West Midlands Theatre Forum. The efforts to revive the Forum in late 1997 were probably stimulated by an awareness of this shortcoming, and the attempt to set up a Birmingham forum arose directly from needs emerging from the City Council's cultural strategy consultations.

6.4 Conclusion

These examples of changes in the lives of organisations, and thus in the dynamics of networks, suggest that the extent of active relationships affects both the likelihood of there being openings for practitioners to be involved in consultation, and the ability of practitioners to have an effect on those consultations. In other words, the possibility of such policy consultations taking place widely, and of being effective, is increased when they are embedded in a network of active collaborations and associations. This is partly because within the networks theatre practitioners are able to have regular contact not only with other practitioners but also with funders, making it more likely that openings will be made for them to contribute towards the policy process. It is also because such networks enable the constituent organisations, both individually and collectively, to have a greater impact and to carry more weight in their dealings with those whom they are trying to influence, whether these are funders or theatre managements. The networks are thus one of the key ways in which arts practitioners are able, through their own actions, to turn themselves from 'outsider' to 'insider' groups, or from limited to privileged access.

Many of the examples of successful influence by theatre practitioners on policy have occurred when there has been some form of joint effort by the practitioners. For instance, when in 1993 the Arts Council's Drama Department planned to cease funding the National Playwrights' Trust, North West Playwrights, Northern Playwrights' Society and Yorkshire Playwrights, a concerted campaign by these organisations, which gained the support of theatres companies, local authorities, and other writers' groups as well as many individual writers, led to a reversal of the decision.

This is not simply the effect of solidarity amongst people affected by a specific change or problem, important though that is. It is that this variety of connections and collaborations – including, importantly, *creative* partnerships – among the wide range of bodies concerned with new playwriting not only strengthens policy-making but actually makes practitioners' contribution into the process more likely. Organisations that have strong links to others have a correspondingly higher profile than they would otherwise; they have more information, expertise, and resources to offer; and they are more likely to be already engaged in contact with the funders responsible for the policies.

There are of course some large, renowned, organisations which are significant enough that they can 'plough their own furrow' (nationally, for instance, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre; regionally, the main producing theatre may fall into this category). But for most of those involved with new playwriting the value of partnerships with others is significant for their ability to influence policy development and implementation. Involvement in active networks is thus a significant means of increasing the resources of both the individual bodies and the smaller networks within the larger

web, and so of making the participants 'resource-richer', and more 'inside' than 'outside'.

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, draws together the evidence and arguments of the preceding chapters, and examines whether the questions about arts practitioners' involvement in policy activity set out at the beginning of the thesis have been answered.

PART III

CONCLUSION

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Putting Theatre Practitioners in the Spotlight

This thesis set out to investigate the role of arts practitioners in the processes of cultural policy formation and implementation, and to discover whether, on the stage of policy activity, they are the non-speaking 'spear-carriers' implied in much of the existing research literature in cultural policy or whether they have a more active and significant role. In so doing it has examined several related matters. These are the history and extent of arts practitioners' participation in cultural policy activity, both generally in post-war Britain and specifically in the case of new theatre writing in England; problems and issues associated with the processes of participation, and how the involvement of practitioners could be facilitated and improved; and, importantly, why it matters whether practitioners do participate.

Part I of the thesis provided an analytical, historical, and theoretical approach to these questions. Chapter 1 argued that the involvement of arts practitioners in cultural policy-making has not been widely recognised as an issue for discussion in cultural policy research, and suggested that the relatively recent development of public cultural policy, and of research in the field, are reasons for this absence, together with a view that artists should not be 'tainted' by such worldly matters as policy. It proposed that approaches in the generic field of public policy research can provide useful tools for considering the subject, pinpointing approaches which pay attention to the role of a wide range of actors in the policy process, and which suggest that those actors can increase their resources of expertise and effectiveness to become 'insider groups' with access to decision-

making. These ideas help to open up an understanding that arts practitioners can be among the actors involved in cultural policy activity, and through self-directed action can enhance their place in the policy process.

The second chapter examined debates in the arts about the representation and participation of practitioners in policy processes, and the influences of the social, political, and economic developments of the times. It showed that concern has been expressed about the exclusion of arts workers from policy-making bodies ever since the setting up of the public arts funding system in Britain in 1945. These concerns were magnified and expressed more forcefully under the impact of the cultural, social, and political changes of the 1960s and early 1970s. The new circumstances and discourse of the 1980s and 1990s had an equally profound effect, and moved the focus away from demands for direct representation on the Arts Council. Economic attrition, the ideology of 'marketisation', the shift from producers to consumers, and the undermining of trade unions and professions, all contributed to this change.

Of key importance is the question as to why the involvement of arts practitioners in cultural policy activity is of any significance. Chapter 3 elaborated a theoretical framework to explore this issue, proposing that the question of their participation can be usefully considered in the context of discussions about democratisation and governance, and through the concept of civil society.

Such discussions have developed across a range of policy fields, and in a wider political arena. Criticisms of conventional representative democracy have led, particularly in recent years, to a range of attempts to widen democratic involvement which can offer practical ideas for developing involvement of arts

practitioners in policy-making. At the same time, changes in government have been occurring whereby decisions about the provision of services, and the delivery of those services, are undertaken by a range of non-statutory organisations, alongside elected governments. The term 'governance' – used to describe this approach – has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, and has been applied to all levels of government, from local to international. This idea of governance is useful for considering the networks in which arts practitioners have been involved in relation to policy-making, and how they might be involved in the future. While the more experimental forms of participatory democracy, and the spreading reality of governance, offer some positive and useful ways of widening participation, they also throw up issues and problems that need resolving. These include issues of representation and accountability; status and influence; and the relationship between 'special interests' and the 'common good'.

If these discussions of democratisation and governance throw light on the *processes* of involvement of arts practitioners in policy activity, the concept of civil society helps to illuminate the *rationale* for their participation. Chapter 3 explored the history and meaning of the civil society concept, and argued that it is central to understanding why practitioners have sought to be engaged in the policy process, and the significance of that engagement for the maintenance of a vibrant democratic arena.

Part II of the thesis focused on the case study of new theatre writing policy. Chapters 4 and 5 examined theatre writing policies and the main actors in this policy sector: the playwrights' organisations, theatre companies, and arts funders. Drawing on mainly unpublished material, interviews and observation, these

chapters paid particular attention to the playwrights' organisations and to their distinctive history of self-generated activity. Arising out of immediate needs – the lack of any standard writer's contract, and threatened cuts in funding schemes for playwrights – these groups quickly developed to embrace a range of activities concerned also with writers' professional development and wider questions about the place of new plays in the repertoire. Developing their own modes of organisation, including participatory democracy, they also sought to build partnerships with others concerned with new playwriting. Intense negotiations and campaigns of an oppositional nature were undertaken alongside close collaborations and open events. Chapters 4 and 5 also discussed key issues and debates within the sector, examining the concerns of practitioners over factors affecting their working conditions (such as low and precarious rates of pay, and theatres' treatment of playscripts) as well as over matters relating to the status and future of new playwriting.

Chapter 6 considered the different forms of policy engagement open to theatre practitioners, and distinguished two principal forms of active participation. These are the 'invited', i.e. through official channels of consultation and review, and the 'uninvited', that is, practitioners' own initiatives and organisation. The chapter argued that the extent of practitioners' organisation and activity has been a significant feature of the policy process in the area of new playwriting. The chapter also explored the make-up and operation of the networks of agencies operating in this policy area. It put forward the idea that these networks cross the boundaries of policy and creative practice, with links being made among practitioners and funders that interweave both creative collaborations and policy activity. These networks of interaction help to open up opportunities for policy input and influence.

This concluding chapter examines whether the initial questions have been answered, both in relation to the case study of playwriting policy and more widely. It considers them under three headings: the involvement of theatre practitioners in policy activity and its effects; the obstacles to participation and the methods used by practitioners to overcome those barriers and facilitate their involvement; and thirdly, the significance of practitioners' engagement in cultural policy activity.

7.1 Theatre Practitioners' Participation and Its Effects

It is clear from my research into new playwriting policy that theatre practitioners have been involved in the policy process throughout the decades since the establishment of the Arts Council, and most particularly since playwrights have organised themselves into their own self-help associations and networks. Part II of the thesis includes many examples of this involvement, the channels through which it takes place, and the range of issues on which their participation has been brought to bear. While these issues have included matters of immediate consequence to playwrights' working lives such as pay levels, ownership of the script, and choice of artistic team producing the writer's play; they have also embraced wider issues, beyond narrow interests, that affect theatres and their audiences, including programming, regional identity, and venues for new plays. Moreover, as a whole, new playwriting has a particular role in affecting the place of theatre in society, helping it to balance heritage with contemporary relevance.

With regard to the effect that theatre practitioners' involvement has had, this is not always easy to quantify, especially in relation to policy outcomes. When I

began this research new playwriting in Britain was enjoying a renaissance. As a proportion of the repertoire, new work had increased from an average of seven per cent in the years from 1986 to 1990 to twenty per cent in the period 1993 to 1996 (Brown and Brannen 1996, p.381; and Arts Council Statistics Unit[1]). The critic Michael Billington, reviewing the past year's theatre, wrote: "the most startling fact of 1996 was the emergence of a new generation of dramatists [...]. Nothing like it has happened since the late 1950s".[2]

It would be inadvisable to attribute this change to a single factor, for a direct line of cause and effect cannot easily be drawn in the complexity of cultural policy. A web of factors has to be considered, including political, economic, and social developments. Thus, while the period had seen concerted activity by theatre practitioners, it had also witnessed political and cultural changes, including a turning away from the Conservatives' emphasis on heritage and a greater acceptance of cultural innovation. Economically, theatre companies were still facing cutbacks, so the growing realisation (emphasised by the playwrights' organisations) that new work was not as much of a risk to box office takings as had been thought, meant that the small casts of many of the new plays became more attractive. The playwright David Edgar also suggests other reasons for the upsurge in new theatre writing at this time, including that the social changes of the last decades of the twentieth century provided writers with "a subject to embrace" (Edgar 1999, p.28). Michael Billington points to the re-invigoration of the Royal Court Theatre under the directorship of Stephen Daldry from 1994 as a further stimulation;[3] and both Edgar and Billington are of the opinion that a

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[1] Statistics provided to author by Arts Council New Theatre Writing officer.
[2] Michael Billington, 'Theatre is alive – official', *Guardian*, 28th December 1996, p.7.
[3] Michael Billington, 'On new British Dramatists', *British Drama and Dance on tour*, British Council, Twelfth issue, July 1998, pp. 2-3.

paucity of original drama on television was an additional reason for playwrights turning to the stage.

Another difficulty encountered in ascertaining the effects of theatre policies – amongst a number of factors that could be influential – is the shortage of useful data. As indicated in Chapter 4, Regional Arts Boards showed diffidence in attributing positive outcomes to their playwriting schemes due to the small scale of these schemes and the lack of baseline information and monitoring systems to establish their effect. Alun Bond and Sue Roberts, in their study of local authority arts policies, faced a similar problem, noting that "the task of identifying the impact an arts policy had made on arts activity was [...] constrained by [the] lack of statistical analysis available from individual authorities. What was available was a range of opinion" (Bond and Roberts 1998, p.8).

Keeping this qualification about the difficulty of attribution in mind, it is nonetheless possible to consider whether the activities of theatre practitioners have had effects on policy development and implementation. Indeed, Bond and Roberts take the view themselves that "local lobbying, by [...] professional arts practitioners, has [...] played an important part in encouraging some Councils to play a more active role in the arts" (1998, p.20). Preceding chapters have given clear examples of influence. These include the early success of the Theatre Writers' Union in reversing the Arts Council's cuts and securing greater dissemination of information about the Council's new writing schemes, when the Union was first formed in the mid-1970s, and the significant achievement of TWU and the Writers' Guild in introducing standard writer's contracts.

The point was made in the previous chapter that in addition to direct inputs into policy discussions, the actual activities of the writers' groups can affect policy more indirectly. This is apparent in the view expressed by the Director of New Writing North (NWN) that the organisation had "raised the game" in the region, "making everybody more conscious [...] that script development and writer development is [...] important". She felt that the work undertaken by NWN had raised awareness among writers, theatres and local authorities, and had provided resources to enable work to take place that would otherwise not have occurred.[4]

In some matters, even if direct causation cannot be certain, the efforts of the practitioners are likely, at the least, to have played an important role in bringing about changes. For instance, one of the factors present during the gradual improvement in theatre companies' treatment of unsolicited scripts has been the concerted attention paid by playwrights' organisations to this issue. So although it cannot be stated with certainty that the activities and pressure of those organisations contributed to the change, it is reasonable to assume that they have had some impact. Another example can be seen in the setting up of North West Playwrights, with the aim of increasing the number of new plays produced in the region. Its activities coincided with a rise in new writing as a proportion of the repertoire in the North West, from well below average in 1982 (when NWP was founded) to significantly higher – at 23% – than the average of 16%, by 1991.

The importance of the playwrights' organisations in supporting individual writers has also been evident. Nationally, regionally, and locally playwrights' groups have helped writers in disputes with management; provided them with script

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[4] Author's interview with Claire Malcolm, March 1999.

readers' reports, developmental workshops, and rehearsed readings; and enabled them to access arts funding schemes. Jonathan Meth, Director of Writernet, referring to the Arts Council's Year of the Artist awards in 2000, notes that "where there was a well-resourced writer-support organisation, such as in the North East, to provide information, advice and guidance, playwrights fared well – but when there was no support, such as in the South East, they fared very badly".[5]

The achievements of the playwrights' organisations are borne out in the comments of other observers: for instance Paul Barnard (when Assistant Drama Director at the Arts Council) was of the view that "the doggedness with which playwrights continue to band together [...] to develop and promote their craft in difficult times has had a significant influence on keeping new writing on the agenda" (Barnard 1991, p.42).

It is also the case however that, as this thesis has indicated, theatre practitioners have not always been able to achieve the impact they sought or to influence policy successfully. The next section summarises the obstacles that have acted as a constraint on their involvement in the policy process, and discusses ideas and practices to facilitate and improve that involvement.

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[5] Jonathan Meth, 'Playing fast and loose', *ArtsNews*, Issue 64, Summer 2003, p.14.

7.2 Overcoming Obstacles to Participation

Even where arts practitioners have been invited to participate in policy activity, as well as where they have made their own attempts to do so, a number of obstacles have inhibited that participation. In order to overcome these difficulties funders and practitioners have been required to consider both the improvement of official channels for participation and the ability of arts practitioners themselves to create ways of influencing policy.

The obstacles encountered by practitioners in their attempts to influence policy, as shown in this thesis, are two-fold. They relate, firstly, to issues of method and, secondly, to contextual factors. The issues of method concern the channels open to them to affect policy formation and implementation. These have included both their place on decision-making bodies and the consultation processes available to them. As we saw in Chapter 2, their access to the Arts Council and its committees and panels was a matter of contention over many years, and practitioners engaged in debates and made efforts to change the ways in which these bodies were constituted. Then, as consultations grew in number, at national, regional, and local level, theatre workers took an active part in these. But, as indicated in preceding chapters, such consultative processes have often evinced serious shortcomings, resulting in the views of practitioners being excluded or discounted.

It is not always clear, however, that the funding bodies conducting these consultations recognise the weaknesses and problems in them. The first step therefore is for this awareness to be increased and then the necessity of overcoming the problems to be recognised. The question of overcoming the

difficulties can be met partly by improvements to existing methods: for example, wide and well-publicised invitations to participate, ample time scales for responses, clear explanations in the resulting reports and policy statements as to which contributions are accepted and why. Consultative processes could also be enhanced through drawing on aspects of the alternative modes and ideas of democratisation, such as deliberative debates and citizens' juries, discussed earlier in the thesis. In particular, such changes would be best developed not by funders alone, but in concert with arts practitioners, so ensuring a greater likelihood that they would be effective and appropriate.

It is partly in response to the difficulties they encountered that theatre practitioners (both playwrights and theatre companies) established their own organisations and campaigns, and took part in the activities discussed in preceding chapters, in order to change the operations, schemes, and funding levels of the funders, and to improve the treatment of writers and the proportion of new plays produced by theatre companies. These organisations and activities have played a role not only in their own right but also through the networks of which they have been a part. The involvement in such networks, by increasing the resources (of expertise, information, and standing), has enhanced the status of the component organisations within them, in the way articulated by Wyn Grant (1978) and developed by William A. Maloney et al (1994) in the concept of 'insider' groups with 'privileged access'. In this model the actions of the groups concerned can have an influence on their place in policy-making. Thus, as a result of the efforts of theatre practitioners themselves – through their own agency – their participation in policy activity is improved and better facilitated. At the same time, it is important to recall instances of shortcomings in theatre

workers' attempts to organise themselves or to see through their actions:[6] there are many improvements that practitioners, too, can make to enhance their involvement in, and influence on, policy activity, which have been indicated in the discussions of policy participation and organisation in the preceding chapters.

The contextual factors affecting practitioners' involvement are clearly far less open to alteration. These factors, as we have seen in Chapter 2, include changes in the economic circumstances in which arts funders and theatre companies have to operate; the political and ideological demands made by government, such as for market imperatives to be applied to the public sector; and cultural changes that affect the place of the author or the role of theatre itself. Theatre practitioners have responded to changes in context in three main ways.

Firstly, they have resisted the changes, making demands to limit their effects, such as for more money to be made available to the theatre sector as a whole and, in this case, to new writing in particular.

Secondly, they have found ways to accommodate to them, to some extent, without losing sight of their objectives. For example, we have seen how playwrights' organisations changed their approaches at various times in order to adapt to alterations in their situation. At the end of the twentieth century this has been evident again, as several of the writers' groups have broadened out to take into account the growing number of writers who earn their living not only with stage writing but also in film, television, and radio. Thus, while the perception in the mid-1970s that stage writers had needs distinct from other writers led to the

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[6] For example, the failure of West Midlands Theatre Forum to maintain itself as an active network.

establishment of the Theatre Writers' Union, the more recent setting up of New Writing North and the re-launch of Stagecoach! as Script, with a brief to cover a much wider range of media, are responses to the changed circumstances and concerns of writers today.

Thirdly, theatre practitioners have responded to these contextual factors by creating alternative ways of working, in a sense by-passing the context. For example, when economic stringency led to the number of commissions for new plays falling, Northern Playwrights' Society gave its support to workshops and readings in the region, in place of full productions (Rigby [1995], pp.7-8).

Clearly, above all, it is essential for practitioners to maintain awareness of these contextual factors so that they can keep abreast of changes and by so doing, formulate demands, make their own changes, and develop practices that protect and extend their interests in new circumstances. This point is reflected by Jonathan Meth, discussing "the disappearance of ring fenced pots" for new writing after the re-organisation of the Arts Council in 2002-3. He surmises that "playwrights must get cannier in unlocking funds to support themselves", and moreover sees a "new opportunity" for playwrights to "shift slightly the balance of power over the development of their working lives away from directors".[7]

The significance of these developments, of the attempt to increase and improve participation in policy-making, is further understood by returning to the question of why practitioners' involvement in cultural policy activity is worth both considering and doing something about.

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[7] Jonathan Meth, 'Playing fast and loose', *ArtsNews*, Issue 64, Summer 2003, p.14.

7.3 Why the Participation of Arts Practitioners Matters

One of the key questions asked by this thesis is whether the involvement of arts practitioners in policy formation and implementation is of any importance. It has answered it through the concept of civil society, and in the context of changes in democracy, the increasing practice of governance, and debates about democratisation. The role of practitioners in policy activity has not, hitherto, been considered in this way in cultural policy research. My argument is that it is crucial to understanding why practitioners have sought to be involved, what the nature of their engagement is, and what the implications of it are.

In its exploration of the idea of civil society this thesis has drawn on a number of writers on this subject, and particularly on the approaches of Antonio Gramsci and Benjamin R. Barber. In their conception, civil society is a distinct sphere separate from government and the market, consisting of the voluntary organisations of society, the activities of social participation and engagement, and values such as inclusiveness and equality.

In these respects the organisations and networks of theatre practitioners can be said to correspond to the characteristics of civil society. Firstly, playwrights' organisations, theatre companies and their management bodies, and the partnerships and collaborations amongst them, fall clearly within the definition of 'voluntary' organisations and connections. Further, their involvement in policy debate and implementation, and their own initiatives of public events, campaigns, and specialist activities, are manifestly examples of civic engagement. And lastly, their activities in support of all theatre writers at whatever stage of development they are in or whichever kind of theatre they write for, and the

embracing of a wide range of individuals and organisations concerned with new playwriting at their organised events, demonstrate a level of inclusiveness and equal regard.

The networks in which they are involved also reflect the "weak ties" and "association around common activity rather than common history" that James Gibson (1998, p.4) and Benjamin R. Barber (1998, p.50) respectively have argued are the vital connections that prevent civil society from being, on the one hand, atomised and, on the other, so closely knit that it becomes exclusionary.

It could be argued that in at least one respect – that is, the focus of regional playwrights' organisations on the writers of their own region – the practice *was* exclusionary. But there were very practical reasons for this, i.e. that some of the regional funders expected only regional writers to benefit, and that some degree of protectionism for local playwrights was considered necessary, as we saw with regard to the Northern region. There was also, though, evidence of flexibility: for example, Stagecoach! opened up some of its workshops to writers from other regions while Yorkshire Playwrights frequently advertised its meetings and events in North West Playwrights' newsletter. More importantly, on the crucial question of protection of playwrights' working conditions, both the regional groups and TWU nationally gave support and advice to non-members.[8] Moreover, commentators from outside the immediate circle of playwrights and theatre companies (for example, theatre critics and publishers of plays) have

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[8] A TWU newsletter [April 1984], for example, refers to the West Midlands TWU branch having "intervened at two major reps and [...] been successful in obtaining significant sums of money owed to members and non-members alike" [p.11].

expressed their understanding that the concerns of these practitioners have a wider bearing on the theatre sector as a whole and are not just a narrow concern.

The playwrights' organisations have not, therefore, sought to improve their own status as 'insiders' at the expense of others remaining 'outside'. They can in fact be credited with trying to bring as many people as possible within the scope of their activities: contracts with theatre managements cover all scales of professional theatre companies, and there have also been attempts to protect writers working with amateur and community theatres; services such as script-reading and workshops have been provided for playwrights at all stages of their development; and almost every category of person and organisation concerned with new theatre writing has been invited to the conferences, seminars, and other events organised by the playwrights' groups.

Further understanding of the role that civil society can play is illuminated by Gramsci through the concept of hegemony. In his account of this term, the dominant class in society gains its position by consent as well as coercion. Ideology and culture, and therefore cultural and educational organisations, thus play crucial roles both in developing consent for the dominant ideology, and in questioning and challenging that hegemony. Civil society is therefore conceived dynamically, as a place of transition and change, an arena of active civic engagement. An enlarged conception of democracy also flows from this analysis, opening up new issues to democratic debate and activity by a wider range of actors.

Applying the concept of civil society to cultural policy-making provides us with a way of seeing cultural organisations as examples of the voluntary associations

making up the sphere of civil society, and of considering them as active participants in a dynamic arena of democratic engagement and change. In the same way that it enabled cultural studies, when it emerged as a new discipline, to open up examination of the role of culture in society, it can also provide a framework for examining the policies governing that culture and the role of arts practitioners, not only in creating their art, but also in developing the policies within which they and their organisations operate and by which their art is disseminated. And because it contains a conception of transformation, it may therefore be used not only as an insight into existing conditions, but also to suggest changes – changes which are nevertheless rooted in an analysis of present practice.

The concept of civil society can also help to deepen discussions of democratisation and governance, which, as this thesis has suggested, are particular features of the context in which the involvement of arts practitioners needs to be considered. It can do this particularly through its contribution to understanding the role of democratic participation. There are two aspects to this: one, that the concepts of state and democracy are expanded through the notion of civil society; and two, that participation is critical to democracy and its exercise is linked to that of power in society.

Thus, firstly, the conceptual expansion of state and democracy by the inclusion of civil society brings a wider range of actors and issues into play, and so provides both relevance and possibility to the notion of governance, since governance is the partnership of government and non-statutory organisations. These non-statutory organisations are examples of the 'voluntary' associations of civil society, existing independently of political society and therefore able to

enter into partnership with government. Since these voluntary associations include arts organisations, the involvement of arts practitioners in policy-making can therefore be comprehended not as a problem or an irritant, but as an instance of the active realisation of governance.

Secondly, civil society is the sphere through which individuals and organisations participate in society as a whole, and participation is central to the concept of civil society. It therefore links the concept to the ideas and experiments of democratisation, providing a basis for those practical measures and making civil society concrete and realisable. At the same time, the concept of civil society opens up a conception of power as being diffused throughout society. Participation, too, therefore needs to be conceived widely, involving a range of actors and issues.

By drawing together these themes of democratisation, governance, and civil society, a framework is created in which to consider the question of arts practitioners' involvement in cultural policy-making. Through this prism arts workers can be seen as part of the fabric of the civic arena, and their participation in policy activity an element of civic engagement and governance. It is therefore not only a matter of practitioners' own self-interests but can be conceived as contributing to the maintenance and enlargement of democratic life.

7.4 Issues for Further Research

The argument was made in the Introduction for the selection of the case study on the basis of theoretical sampling and that, as an example of the phenomenon

being investigated, the case of new theatre writing provides a wealth of material through which wider questions and issues can be discussed and illuminated. The historical study of the debates about practitioner participation in Chapter 2 has also shown that these matters have been of concern throughout the arts community, and not just among those involved in new playwriting; while the analytical and theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, of the reasons for examining these questions, provides a framework that goes much more widely than the case study alone. The key aspect of further research that would clearly be useful is to discover the extent to which the involvement of theatre practitioners in policy activity around new playwriting is replicated in other areas of the arts, and whether there are different patterns of organisation and participation in other sectors.

There are indications that aspects of the activities and concerns found in the case study of new theatre writing policy do appear elsewhere, evidenced for example by Krister Malm and Roger Wallis's investigation of media music policy (1992) and Simone Wesner's study of visual artists in Germany (2002), in which she refers to the artists "not only as recipients of cultural policy decisions but also as messengers, carriers and developers of cultural policies" (p.20). It would be illuminating to investigate which elements of the new playwriting case study are common to other arts communities. At the same time it is clear that there are variations, not least caused by differences in the sectors themselves. It would therefore also be of value in widening an understanding of arts practitioners' role in policy activity to examine what these differences mean for their participation. Overall, pinpointing both the features in common and the variations would enable conclusions to be reached as to what extent there are lessons that could be applied, especially in relation to the broader points made in this thesis about the

central importance of practitioners' self-directed activity and its role in the context of civil society.

Another area in which the findings of this thesis could be further explored is in relation to the approach, adopted by a number of cultural policy commentators, of cultural policy models. This is exemplified in Harry Hillman-Chartrand and Claire McCaughey's division of the policy strategies adopted by governments into four categories: 'facilitator', 'patron', 'architect', and 'engineer' (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989). Their schema has been further examined in the light of developments that have since occurred, with Jennifer Craik (1996) suggesting that there is an increasing hybridisation taking place. While these models have largely been considered with a 'top-down' approach that focuses on government activity, they must also have implications for the role of other actors in the field, including arts practitioners. Peter Duelund, in his study of Nordic cultural policy, regards the part played by a wide range of actors "in fulfilling the overall objectives" as an "important difference between the various models" (Duelund 2003, p.22). Further research into the way practitioners have been engaged in all aspects of policy activity in the context of these different models and their hybridisation, would be a useful additional dimension to the study both of the models and of the policy-making role of arts practitioners.

Lastly, as noted in the Introduction, this thesis does not examine (except in some specific examples) the effects of practitioners' participation in policy activity on artistic form and content. From the discussion in these pages of the impact on writers and their work of, for instance, policies which confine much new writing to small theatre spaces, it is clear that policy decisions can have a direct effect on aesthetic matters. It is likely, therefore, that practitioners' engagement on a

policy level with such issues will influence this impact on artistic work. Further research, for example examining specific texts or genres, or particular playwrights or theatres, could shed interesting light on this aspect of the subject of arts practitioners' involvement in policy-making.

7.5 Final Points: Arts Practitioners in Civil Society

This thesis has argued that the concept of civil society provides a framework for understanding not only the participation of arts practitioners in policy development and implementation but also, more widely, the role of that participation in helping to sustain democratic society. This last point reflects the understanding that civil society can only be kept alive through use. As Victor Perez-Diaz argues: the "habits and dispositions" of civil society, in which he includes decision-making and responsibility-taking, "are the result of practical experience, and they are acquired by means of repeated activities of the proper kind" (Perez-Diaz 1998, p.217). Civil society is not a state of being but an arena of activity, and if neglected it atrophies.

Chapter 3 described the 'democratic deficit' noted by many commentators with reference to shortcomings in democracy and the disengagement of voters across Europe and beyond; but the bigger question of the very existence of civil society has been considered perhaps to belong more to the Eastern countries of Europe than its western ones. In Britain the long tradition of self-organisation and self-help (e.g. Thompson 1965; Rose 2002) might cause complacency over the resilience of civil society in this country, but the danger of atrophy is just as relevant here.

Indeed, a note of urgency about civil society and the related concept of the public sphere has crept into recent commentaries on both Britain and the cultural sector. David Marquand, for example, argues that in Britain today "the notion of a common public interest transcending private interests has all but disappeared" (Marquand 2004, p.26). Echoing writers like David Hutchison (1999), he claims that the dominance of the market means that there are no longer "citizens, there are only customers" (Marquand, p.26); and he concludes that, as a result, what he calls the 'public domain' is "now in crisis" (p.25). Jim McGuigan, who in 1996 was less pessimistic about the totality of the market's colonisation of the public sphere (McGuigan 1996, p.72), has more recently expressed concern about "the extraordinary ideological grip of neo-liberalism" (McGuigan 2004a, [p.3]) and has argued the need for more research into its effects on cultural policy.

The development of the market society is thus having a serious impact on the public arena, diminishing its scope, influence, and vibrancy. In this large context the question of arts practitioners' participation in policy-making may seem of minor importance. But, as we have seen, one of the key aspects of the concept of civil society is that it both reflects and opens up an understanding that power is exercised throughout society: it "is not to be located in a central point" (Mercer 1980, p.123). It thus contributes towards the conception that the cultural arena is a legitimate and significant one in which to engage with matters of governance and policy. The participation of arts practitioners in policy activity is not, therefore, a marginal issue, but integral to the wider debate about sustaining civil society and democratic engagement. In other words, their involvement matters because it is a component of that exercise of democracy that keeps the democratic body alive.

In this context the question of special interests and the 'common good' needs to be returned to. The argument was made in Chapter 3 that although there is a tension between the interests of a section and the common interest, they are also part of the same whole: that is, the contestation that occurs between different interests contributes towards the common public interest; the public interest only exists as a result of the different sectional interests that are involved in it. This contestation can take place precisely because civil society is a dynamic arena, a sphere in which such debate and struggle takes place. As Marquand puts it: "citizens collectively define what the public interest is to be through argument, debate and negotiation. [...] Agreement on it can never be final" (p.27). Henrik Kaare Nielsen clarifies this further, suggesting that the common good should not be "understood as a substantial, tangible entity, but as a discursive framework within which we, as individuals, and as society, argue over what serves the common good" (Nielsen 2003, p.244). The struggle by arts practitioners over their own particular area of concern can thus be conceived not simply as the defence or promotion of their own interests, but as a contribution to the shaping of a wider public interest. It is therefore also a contribution to the maintenance of the 'public domain', to the co-operative activity and open debate of civil society.

An added dimension to the argument that arts practitioners' involvement in policy activity is significant in maintaining and nourishing civil society is that culture and cultural policy themselves play important roles in the notion of civil society, and have a close relation to the life of the public sphere.

Barber argues that "the arts are civil society's driving engine, the key to its creativity, its diversity, its imagination, and hence its spontaneity and liberty [...]. Civil society depends on the arts" (Barber 1998, p.109). Concerning

cultural policy itself, Nielsen sees it as being "responsible to the democratic debate" (p.243). In the context of civil society's undermining by market society, this role in relation to protecting and advancing the public arena is significant: "in a struggle between the individual as consumer and the individual as citizen [...] cultural policy's responsibility is to the civic aspect of this struggle" (Nielsen, p.244).

It is in these lights, therefore, that the question of improving practitioners' means of participation gains significance as of wider concern than that of the practitioners alone. The continuing existence of the playwrights' organisations and the networks of theatre practitioners, their practices (the services they provide, the collaborations they undertake), and their involvement in policy activity, all contribute to the fabric of civil society and to sustaining it in the face of countervailing trends that would otherwise negate and undermine its make-up, its practices, and its values.

Finally, therefore, to answer the metaphorical question as to whether arts practitioners are merely spear-carriers in the background or have speaking parts at the front of the stage, the conclusion of this research must be that they are indeed actors in the spotlight. As such, they deserve to be recognised, both in the practice and research of cultural policy, as contributors not only to cultural policy formation and implementation, but also to the invigoration of civil society in the twenty-first century.

APPENDIX 1

Interviews

The interviews mostly took place face-to-face, and were tape-recorded, though I also took brief notes as an aide-memoire and to provide me with prompts for follow-up questions during the course of the interview. A few interviews were undertaken by telephone. The interviews took place between January 1999 and May 2000, each lasting about one to one and a half hours, except for the telephone interviews which were about half an hour. Fuller written notes were taken in the telephone interviews as these were not tape-recorded. The interviews were supplemented by shorter conversations, either face-to-face or by telephone, to clarify particular points or to answer one or two specific queries. Some of these supplementary conversations were follow-up discussions with the original interviewees, while the remainder were with other people involved in the field of new playwriting. A list of both interviewees and supplementary respondents is printed below.

All the interviews were semi-structured, with prepared questions guiding the conversation but allowing sufficient flexibility for each discussion to develop according to the responses of the interviewee and the circumstances of the organisation. The broad interview schedule was as follows:

i) What does the organisation do in relation to new writing?

ii) Who are the staff involved in new writing (policy and implementation) in the organisation?

iii) What is the organisation's policy on new writing (aims, objectives, strategies)?

iv) Have there been any significant changes in its policy in the last twenty years?

v) How was the policy developed? Where did the initiative for it come from? Who was involved in developing it, and how? How is it revised?

vi) How is the policy implemented?

vii) What impact has the policy had (including quantity and quality)?

viii) [If appropriate] What relation does new writing have to the other activities of the organisation?

ix) What relationships does the organisation have with other agencies in the city/region/nationally (in relation to new writing policy, activities and events, joint work)?

x) Do other agencies have any influence on the development and implementation of the organisation's policy on new writing? If so, which ones and through what mechanisms?

xi) Does the organisation have, or has it had, any influence on or input into new writing policies in the city/region/nationally? Does the interviewee have any view on which, if any, agencies have the most influence in the city/region/nationally?

xii) [If appropriate] How does the organisation ensure its own representativeness and/or the representativeness of those it consults?

xiii) How does the structure of the organisation affect its involvement in policy-making or its ability to involve others in policy-making?

Interviewees

Not all the names of the interviewees appear in the text of the thesis. This is because some interviewees did not want their comments to be attributed. This means that in some sections, where there was any possibility that the views of one individual might become apparent if others were named, I have chosen the solution of identifying the interviewees collectively, or of not naming any of the respondents in that part of the text.

Where two names are coupled together, this is because they were interviewed together (T = telephone interview)

National & London

Jessica Dromgoole - Literary Manager, Paines Plough [national touring theatre]

Graham Whybrow - Literary Manager, Royal Court Theatre, London

Paul Sirett - Literary Manager, Soho Theatre, London (T)

Tony Craze - Theatre Writing Associate, London Arts Board

Charles Hart - Drama Officer for Theatre Writing, Arts Council of England

Northern region

Claire Malcolm - Director, New Writing North

Peter Mortimer - Secretary, Northern Playwrights Association

Graeme Rigby – Playwright; Board member New Writing North; author of *Starting From Here: Developing a New Writing Strategy for the North*

Max Roberts - Artistic Director, Live Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Ed Robson - Associate Director, Northern Stage, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Andrew Rothwell - City Arts Officer, Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council

Mark Mulqueen - Performing Arts Officer, Northern Arts Board

North West region

Louise Mulvey - Director, North West Playwrights

Sarah Frankcom - Literary Manager, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

Jo Crowther - Principal Officer, Association of Greater Manchester Authorities Grants Unit

Ian Tabbron - Performing Arts Officer (Drama), North West Arts Board

West Midlands

Christine McGowan - Administrator, Stagecoach!

Guy Hutchins – Writer; Chair, Stagecoach!

Lance Woodman – Playwright; Co-Chair, Swan Playwrights, Worcester

Chris O'Connell – Playwright; Artistic Director, Theatre Absolute, Coventry

Jane Hytch - Associate Producer, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry

Cathryn Goodwin - Project Co-ordinator, Coventry Theatre Network

Jenny Stephens - Artistic Director, Worcester Swan Theatre

Liz Dart - Arts Development Officer, Worcester City Council

Yorkshire

Ray Brown - Playwright; Board member, Yorkshire Playwrights & Ian Watson – Administrator, Yorkshire Playwrights

Wendy Harris - Artistic Director, Red Ladder Theatre, Leeds (T)

Deborah Paige - Artistic Director, Sheffield Theatres

Lucy Best - Assistant to Associate Director and Acting Literary Manager, West Yorkshire Playhouse & Natasha Betteridge - Associate Director, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

Bill Paton - Performing and Community Arts Manager, Sheffield City Council

Rob Whinnett - Acting Assistant Director, Leisure Services, Leeds City Council (T)

Shea Connolly - Drama Officer, Yorkshire Arts

Shorter interviews or specific inquiries took place with:

David Edgar - Playwright; Co-founder, Theatre Writers' Union (national and West Midlands branch); Founder, MA in Playwriting Studies, University of Birmingham

Jonathan Meth - Director, New Playwrights' Trust/Writernet

Gillian Wall - Arts Development Manager, Durham County Council

Chris Bridgman - Co-Director, North West Playwrights

Judith Rose - Co-Director, North West Playwrights

Ian Brown - in his capacity of having been involved in Scottish Society of Playwrights and North West Playwrights' Workshops

Ben Payne - Literary Manager, Birmingham Repertory Theatre

Alison Gagen - Performing Arts Officer (Drama), West Midlands Arts

Ashley Barnes - for Performance Sheffield

In addition to these defined inquiries, I also benefited from numerous more informal discussions with theatre practitioners and funders at a variety of national, regional, and local meetings and events, some of which I attended primarily in my capacity as a worker for an arts organisation. Several conferences and meetings were also attended specifically to further my research. These were:

- Birmingham University MA in Playwriting Studies seminars, 1998-2001.
- *Mentors or Censors?: How playwrights work with dramaturgs and literary managers* - organised by Birmingham University MPhil in Playwriting Studies, with Stagecoach!, 29th-31st January 1999.
- *Losing the Plot?: The Tenth Birmingham Theatre Conference* - organised by Birmingham University MA in Playwriting Studies, 30th March-1st April 1999.
- Coventry Theatre Network: *3rd Big Meeting Day*, 10th February 1999; *8th Big Meeting Day*, 29th February 2000.
- *Playwriting – Dead or Alive?* - organised by Stagecoach!, 1st July 2000.
- *Writing Onwards: Finding and Developing New Playwrights* - organised by Stagecoach!, 19th May 2001.

APPENDIX 2

Playwrights' Organisations – International Connections

The self-help movement among playwrights has not been confined to England. There have been organisations, forums, and events set up in many countries in Europe, North America, and Australia; and from the beginning, a feature of developments in England has been the contact and collaboration with playwrights from abroad.

One of the early influences on the development of the British playwriting organisations was the National Playwrights Conference at the O'Neill Center in Connecticut, USA. Ian Brown, one of the founders of North West Playwrights' Workshops, recounts how in 1974, when he was chairman of the Scottish Society of Playwrights, he attended the O'Neill Conference "to see what lessons could be learned for the establishment of a similar process in Scotland" (Brown, 1984). Although it was called a conference, the heart of the O'Neill model was a concentrated series of practical workshops leading to staged readings of new playscripts, and detailed discussion of the works presented. Before these workshops there was a process of script-reading and selection, followed by organised discussions between each writer selected and the director assigned to him or her (Ballet, 1978).

After the Scottish visit to Connecticut, SSP organised a number of workshops of its own, including a nine day event at Newbattle Abbey in 1976 (Haase, 1979). Two years later the new theatre writing conference organised at the University of East Anglia, mentioned above, focused particularly on the Connecticut

experience. It also received input from SSP, from the Australian Playwrights Conference (which began in 1973 "as almost a carbon copy of the O'Neill Conference" (Theatre Quarterly 1978, p.66)), and on developments in Canada (Gass, 1979). When Ian Brown later became involved in setting up North West Playwrights' Workshops, the experiences of the O'Neill Playwrights' Conference, SSP's workshops, and the national conferences in Australia and Canada, were all cited in the organisation's application for funding. Cecil Taylor's connections with SSP must have provided a similar thread to the O'Neill Conference in the workshops run by Northern Playwrights' Society.

Such international connections continued to play a part in the work of the playwrights' organisations. While developing its campaign for the 'dead writers' levy', the Theatre Writers' Union contacted numerous playwrights' bodies abroad to find out more about how new writing was supported in other countries, and whether lessons could be drawn for writers in England. At the regional level, North West Playwrights invited writers from several European countries to its summer workshops in 1994 as part of Manchester's City of Drama events that year, pairing each one with an English playwright throughout the festival;[1] and in the following year, Yorkshire Playwrights began to develop links with writers in several countries in Europe and North America, which led to the setting up of its International Playwrights Exchange. Under this umbrella, Yorkshire Playwrights' activities have included a collaborative weekend symposium on Dutch, Flemish, and British new writing for the stage, linked to the publication of Dutch and Flemish plays in Britain; and participation by members of Yorkshire Playwrights in international events abroad, such as the Women Playwrights' Conference and

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[1] Archive of North West Playwrights, NWP 3/1/4.

a conference on writing in Slovenia. TWU was also involved in the International Theatre Institute and its Playwrights' Committee, including working on a report on playwrights' conditions round the world;[2] and Writernet has run a project for playwrights from a number of countries, called *The Fence*, which was linked to the Informal European Theatre Meeting conference in Birmingham in 2003.

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[2] International Theatre Institute Playwrights Committee, *Profession: Playwright!*, Paris, 1988.

APPENDIX 3

Theatre Companies Involved in New Playwriting

This Appendix gives a brief account of some of the main theatres involved in new playwriting, in order to give an indication of the history and activities of theatre companies which have a focus on new plays and on the support and development of playwrights. Many of these theatres are significant nationally, and even internationally, for their work on new writing. A more comprehensive picture can be obtained from Writernet's *Script Routes* (1999 and updated) which lists over one hundred theatre companies in the U.K. and their policies towards new writing.

The most well-known of the new-writing theatres is the **English Stage Company** at the **Royal Court Theatre** in London. Since its foundation it has developed a strong national and international reputation for its production of new plays and its support for writers. As well as commissioning playwrights, the Royal Court receives thousands of play scripts – around two and a half thousand per year by 1996 – giving it "strong claims to being the largest script development centre in world theatre".[1] At the end of the decade the theatre estimated that it was then receiving up to three thousand scripts. All of these scripts are read, and the reader's report is sent to the writer. By the mid-1990s there were up to nineteen productions a year at the theatre, of which all were new plays. Each of the plays presented is published afterwards as a playtext by the Royal Court.

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[1] Paul Taylor, 'Let's do the new plays right here', *Independent*, 2 October 1996, section 2, pp.8-9.

Conceived as a theatre that would be 'writer-centred', with an emphasis on new writing, the English Stage Company was set up in the mid-1950s. It became a focus for playwrights, where they were "given the chance to learn the craft of playwriting by experience and to go on learning", and were encouraged to regard the place "as a workshop" (Browne 1975, p.18). Access to rehearsals, free seats for performances, and a writers' group were some of the opportunities for playwrights which gave the Royal Court "a special identity as a writers' theatre" (Findlater 1981, p.43). Throughout most of its history the theatre has continued to place great emphasis on building and maintaining strong relationships with writers, and has developed services to support and develop playwrights, such as script workshops, writers' groups, and young writers' competitions and festivals. It has also built up an active international department, that has encouraged and worked with writers in many other countries. The Royal Court's influence on new theatre writing has been widely recognised: it has discovered and developed many new playwrights, impacted on the wider theatre community, and through its work had "a measurable influence on the social climate of Britain" (Esslin 1975, p.iii).

Another London theatre that has developed a range of provision to support and present new writing is the **Soho Theatre Company**, which follows a policy of producing only new plays and of actively encouraging new writers. First established in 1968, it embarked in 1995 on a major new development to build a new theatre and writers' centre, on the site of an old synagogue in Dean Street, where playwrights would be able to meet and work together in spaces especially designated for their activities. The Soho Theatre operates a script reading service (receiving over fifteen hundred scripts a year), in which all plays sent to it are read, assessed, and advised on by a readers' panel, and from which have resulted

many of its productions. It also runs workshops for a large number of new and emerging writers, including skills workshops and sessions on work-in-progress, as well as rehearsed readings and showcase productions, and it has a new writers' play competition, the Verity Bargate Award. These activities are all aimed at fulfilling the theatre's commitment to meeting the needs of playwrights for the development of their craft, and together with the new plays produced by the theatre, have earned it a national reputation as a "home for new writing".[2]

Other London-based theatres known nationally for their new writing policy include the **Bush Theatre, Hampstead Theatre,** and **Tricycle Theatre**. The **Royal National Theatre's Studio** is an important space for the development of new writing "outside the confines of the rehearsal room and stage where artists can experiment and develop their skills" (Writernet 1999, p.15). Plays developed there might go on to performance not necessarily at the National itself but at other theatres around the country.

Outside London a number of theatre companies have developed new plays as an important part of their repertoire. These include the **Royal Exchange Manchester, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Live Theatre** in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the **Stephen Joseph Theatre** in Scarborough (well-known for its long-standing director, producer and leading playwright, Alan Ayckbourn). Some theatres also provide services and events such as script-reading, workshops, writers' groups, and festivals of new work in order to support writers and encourage the creation of new theatre writing. **Birmingham Repertory Theatre** provides a good illustration of this kind of programme of new writing and

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[2] David James, 'Soho Seasons', *Writers' Newsletter*, April 1997, p.12.

development activities. As a result of being awarded a stabilisation grant by the Arts Council, it re-opened its studio theatre (re-named The Door) in 1998 with the aim of presenting a complete programme of new plays there. This has been accompanied by workshops, presentations of work-in-progress, talks, and events to both support writers and raise the profile of, and audience for, new writing; and a series of attachment schemes for both experienced and new writers, enabling them to have support from the theatre for six months, while they develop ideas for a play or experiment with new approaches to their work. Each of the new plays produced in The Door is published for sale to coincide with the performances. The theatre also runs a young writers' group each year, which culminates in an annual festival to showcase their work. These activities have resulted in an increase in audience numbers for the company's programme of new plays.

In addition to the building-based theatres, there are many touring companies focusing on new writing. Two of the best-known are **Out of Joint** and **Paines Plough**. Out of Joint aims to "create and generate a substantial body of new writing for the stage" (Writernet, p.45), working with both established and new playwrights. It was formed in 1993, and premieres two or more plays a year, frequently in co-productions with other theatre companies. Paines Plough was founded in 1974, and now produces only new plays, which it tours to a variety of small-scale venues throughout the country. It describes itself as "dedicated to the discovery, development and production of new writing" (Writernet, p.45). It receives seven to eight hundred scripts a year, which, as long as the scripts are from UK residents or are plays about the UK, are all read and reported on by its team of readers. The company rarely produces an unsolicited play, preferring to develop first a relationship with any writer whose script has interested the

company. Paines Plough also provides support to playwrights who they are interested in working with, by running regular writers' groups and workshops, and an innovation introduced by the dramatist Sarah Kane, called the 'Lock-in', whereby writers are given a weekend to produce the draft of a short play. According to Vicky Featherstone, Paines Plough's Artistic Director, this approach is so successful that "more experienced writers who've had some kind of interface with that project often ask if they can come to the Lock-in to write" (Loretto and Wilson 2003a, p.48). In addition to presenting its own plays, it has also worked with other theatres and writing organisations on projects to develop work with young writers.

Among smaller touring companies building a reputation for new writing is **Theatre Absolute**. Based in Coventry, it tours nationally with new plays, including work written by its artistic director Chris O'Connell; and also runs the Writing House, which aims to provide opportunities for writers to develop their work in a supportive environment. **The Wrestling School** has a unique relationship with playwright Howard Barker, having been set up in 1988 for the specific purpose of producing his work. As well as performances of his plays it organises workshops and readings, and aims to develop its own particular theatre methodology.

The touring of new plays is also carried out by specialist theatre companies. These include **Graeae,** which employs disabled theatre practitioners, including playwrights, and explores the experiences of disabled people in its work. **Pentabus**, which is based in Shropshire, specialises in touring to rural areas in the region. It has developed its work around new writing since the late 1990s, and also runs a local writers' group. **Nitro**, formerly the Black Theatre Co-

operative, commissions work by black British writers and aims to provide opportunities for black theatre workers and to develop contemporary black British theatre.

Theatre-in-education companies, such as **Big Brum Theatre in Education**, and theatre companies specialising in work for young people, such as **Red Ladder** and **Theatre Centre**, also commission and produce new plays on a regular basis, developing close relationships with the playwrights with whom they work. Big Brum, for example, has collaborated with renowned playwright Edward Bond since 1995: commissioning plays from him on a regular basis and working to develop a shared theatre practice and theory.

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